NATION

Bengali Muslims must stop polygamy says, Assam CM

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BUSINESS

FPIs infuse over ₹38K cr in equities in March

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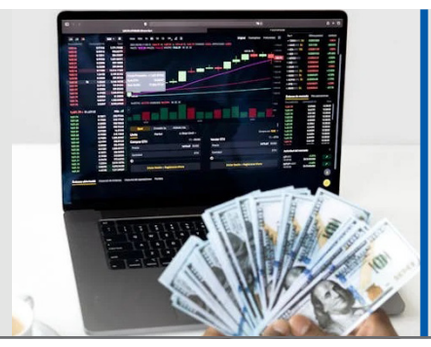

SPORTS

Gujarat Titans beat Mumbai Indians by 6 runs in a last-over thriller

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LS polls: BJP announces 4 more candidates for K'taka

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Former chief minister Jagadish Shettar and former Karnataka Assembly speaker Vishveshwar Hegde Kageri are among the four candidates in BJP's second list for Karnataka on Sunday.

As expected, Shettar will contest from Belagavi constituency, while Kageri will fight from Uttara Kannada district, replacing sitting MP Anantkumar Hegde. According to the list released by the party in New Delhi, the other two candidates fielded by the party are former Health Minister K Sudhakar from Chikkaballapur and Raja Amareshwara Naik from Raichur.

Shettar assumed different positions right from party State President, leader of Opposition, Assembly speaker and Chief Minister of Karnataka. Shettar quit BJP in 2023 when he was denied a ticket in Assembly election. In less than a year, he was back to his parent organisation.

Jagadish Shettar will contest from Belagavi constituency, while Vishveshwar Hegde Kageri will fight from Uttara Kannada **PHOTO: PTI**

Shettar wanted to contest Lok Sabha election from Haveri constituency but the party decided to field him from Belagavi. Kageri's selection was also on the anvil as the party had made up its mind to find a suitable replacement to Anantkumar Hegde, who had caused much embarrassment to the party time and again.

Kageri, a six-time MLA, is well known for his balanced views, his strong footing in RSS ideology and well-weighed words. He hails from Sirsi in Uttara Kannada. As Union Minister of State, Hedge, on 26 December, 2017, said that BJP came to power to change the Constitution triggering a nationwide uproar. Later, he had to apologise for his comment.

Recently, Hegde said BJP's call for winning more than 400 seats in Lok Sabha was to bring amendments to Constitution. This led to sharp reactions from various quarters. Sudhakar is a well known name in Chikkaballapur. He lost the 2023 Assembly election from Chikkaballapur.

He was previously with the Congress but resigned from the assembly in 2019, a year after winning the election. A medical professional Sudhakar was among the 18 disqualified MLAs who later joined BJP. He successfully contested the 2019 bypoll and during Covid-19 pandemic he was given the health and medical education portfolio. The BJP has so far announced candidates for 24 Lok Sabha constituencies.

—PTI

100K LITRE OF WATER EVERY DAY

BWSSB declares free water supply in City

People collect free drinking water from a tanker due to the ongoing water crisis, in Bengaluru **PHOTO: PTI**

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

As the City is witnessing the worst water crisis in the recent times, the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has announced free supply of one lakh litre of Cauvery water every day to densely populated areas in the City on Sunday.

During the inspection at the Ambedkar, Gandhinagar, and Bangarappa Nagar slums of Nayandahalli-Pantharapalya by the BWSSB Chairman Ram Prasath Manohar, it was observed that the water level in borewells drilled by the slum board had fallen leading to the inadequate water supply.

"Currently 22 Sintex tanks are placed in the Ambedkar slum area, with water being supplied twice a day through tankers, amounting to a total of one lakh litres per day. We are planning to supply it to other slum areas as well." Manohar said.

Earlier BWSSB had initiated a project to combat the water scarcity in Bengaluru by filling 14 dried-up lakes with treated water aiming to boost the groundwater level and mitigate the drinking water shortage in the City. The lakes targeted for this project will collectively hold 316 Million Litres per Day (MLD) of treated water, significantly contributing to the restoration of water resources in Bengaluru.

The 14 lakes selected for this initiative include Vengaian Lake, Yelemallappa Chetti Kere Lake, Halasuru Lake, Sarakki Lake, Agram Lake, Hulimavu Lake, Chikkabegur Lake, Madivala Lake, Jakkur Lake, Allasandra Lake, Kalkere Lake, Chikkabanavara Lake, Nayandahalli Lake, and Madavara Lake. Out of which the Kengri lake have been rejuvenated specifically with the treated water from the Kengeri wastewater treatment plant is being channeled to Kengeri lake, with ongoing efforts to fill treated water into Dubasipalya, Hoskeralli, and Halagevaderahalli lakes.

—Salar News

ON 31 MARCH

INDIA to hold 'maha rally' to 'safeguard democracy': AAP

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Opposition INDIA will hold a "maha rally" at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan on 31 March to safeguard the country's interests and democracy, AAP leader Gopal Rai said on Sunday.

The announcement comes after Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, 55, was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday from his official residence in connection with an excise policy-linked money-laundering case. A court on Friday sent the AAP national convenor to the central agency's custody till 28 March.

Addressing a press conference, INDIA allies AAP and Congress announced the rally. "We will hold a 'maha rally' at Ramlila Maidan on March 31 against what is happening in the country. The top leadership of the INDIA bloc will participate in the event," Rai said. Rai claimed that Kejriwal's arrest has angered people who respect the Constitution.

Gopal Rai **PHOTO: PTI**

"It is not only about Kejriwal. The entire Opposition is being threatened. Either they use money to buy people or scare them by using ED and the CBI. If someone refuses to bow, they get them arrested under false cases," Rai alleged. The Delhi minister cited the arrest of former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and alleged that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and RJD leader Tejaswi Yadav are also being targeted. Soren's Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress and RJD are all members of the Opposition INDIA.

"All INDIA bloc leaders are being framed in false cases. They turned Delhi into a fortress. Elected MLAs, ministers were detained when they were protesting. Kejriwal's family was placed under house arrest," Rai further charged.

—PTI

INDIA bloc intact, will cross 272: Jairam Ramesh

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

INDIA bloc is intact despite Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's "somersault" and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee deciding to be Mamata Banerjee, senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has said, rejecting as "hollow" Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pitch against the Opposition on corruption.

In an interaction with PTI editors at the news agency's headquarters here, Ramesh also said the Opposition will unitedly cross the halfway mark of 272 in the elections and oust BJP from power. He spoke on a range of issues including electoral bonds, the arrests of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and JMM leader Hemant Soren, who resigned as Jharkhand Chief Minister, and many more respectively. *—PTI*

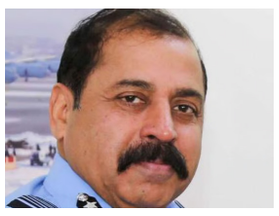


PHOTO: PTI

Former IAF chief Bhadauria joins BJP

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Former Indian Air Force chief RKS Bhadauria joined BJP on Sunday and praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership and the steps taken by his government to modernise and strengthen the armed forces. Varaprasad Rao, a former MP and a YSR Congress leader from Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, also joined BJP in the presence of Union Minister Anurag Thakur and party General Secretary Vinod Tawde. Thakur noted that two people with a long track record in government service chose BJP to contribute to the nation, asserting that the prime minister has been working for the country's security, prosperity and development. He noted that it was this government that fulfilled the demand for 'One Rank, One Pension' of armed forces veterans, scrapped Article 370 and boosted the country's internal security. *—PTI*

4 -year-old raped at tuition centre

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

A four-year-old girl was allegedly raped by 34-year-old brother of her teacher at her tuition centre in east Delhi's Pandav Nagar, sparking a protest in the area with people vandalising some vehicles on Sunday. They said an FIR has been registered and the accused is arrested. They also said inflammatory messages about the case are being circulated through WhatsApp to spoil the atmosphere, and urged people to maintain peace. The alleged incident happened on Saturday when the girl was at her tuition centre, which is run by the teacher from her home, police said. The incident also drew political reactions with BJP demanding strict action against the accused, and AAP claiming it is a sign of poor law and order situation. *—PTI*

Pak considering resuming trade ties with India

ISLAMABAD, 24 MARCH

Pakistan will "seriously" consider restoring trade ties with India that remained suspended since August 2019, Foreign Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar has said, indicating a potential shift in diplomatic stance towards the neighbouring nation.

Dar made these remarks during a press conference in London following his participation in the Nuclear Energy Summit in Brussels, Geo News reported. He highlighted the eagerness of cash-strapped Pakistan's business community to resume trade activities with India.

"Pakistani businessmen want trade with India to resume," the foreign minister said on Saturday. His remarks indicated a potential shift in diplomatic stance towards India.

Pakistan downgraded its diplomatic ties with New Delhi after the Indian government abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution, revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcating the State into two Union Territories.

The decision, Islamabad said, undermined the environment for holding talks between the neighbours. The chances of trade with India remains elusive due to lack of consensus among the stakeholders regarding the restoration of trade relations between the two neighbours, The Express Tribune newspaper reported, quoting sources familiar with the development.

Sources told the paper that there was no concrete proposal on the table at this stage regarding the resumption of trade ties between Pakistan and India.

A study conducted by an international financial institution shows that the true trade potential between Pakistan and India could be over $25 billion. *—PTI*

BHARAT BIOTECH BEGINS CLINICAL TRIALS OF TB VACCINE ON ADULTS

HYDERABAD, 24 MARCH

Bharat Biotech International on Sunday said it started clinical trials of the Tuberculosis vaccine Mtbvac on adults in India. This is the first vaccine against Tuberculosis derived from a human source by the Spanish biopharmaceutical company, Biofabri, a press release from Bharat Biotech said. Mtbvac is being developed for two purposes; firstly, as a more effective and potentially longer-lasting vaccine than Bacillus Calmette Guérin for newborns and secondly, for the prevention of TB in adults and adolescents, for whom there is currently no effective vaccine. The trials are carried out by Bharat Biotech in close collaboration with Biofabri. Trials to evaluate the safety and immunogenicity of Mtbvac have started with a pivotal safety, immunogenicity and efficacy trial which has been planned to start in 2025, the release said. *—PTI*

Kejri issues first direction from ED custody to govt

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Enforcement Directorate (ED) has taken cognisance of Delhi Minister Atishi's statement that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal sent her directions from the agency's custody to initiate public welfare works related to water and sewerage, official sources said on Sunday.

The federal agency will conduct an investigation to ascertain if these directions from Kejriwal were in line with the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court's order issued to ED and Kejriwal during his custody period, the sources said.

While remanding Kejriwal in ED custody till 28 March, the court had allowed his wife Sunita Kejriwal and personal assistant Bibhav Kumar to meet him every day for half hour between 6 and 7 pm, apart from his lawyers for another half hour.

Earlier on Sunday, Water Minister Atishi said at a press conference that Kejriwal sent her a document from ED custody on Saturday with "his directions" to resolve public issues related to water and sewerage.

She said Kejriwal directed that a sufficient number of water tankers be deployed in areas facing a water shortage to strengthen supply ahead of the summer months.

ED, the sources said, will investigate if due processes were followed during these meetings.

Kejriwal was arrested by ED on 21 March following raids at his official residence in connection with the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case," by BJP-led central government.

—PTI

CASES FILED AGAINST 35 SOMALIAN PIRATES CAPTURED BY INS KOLKATA

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

Thirty-five Somali pirates, who were captured by the Indian Navy's INS Kolkata, were handed over to Mumbai Police and a case was registered against them on Saturday. Due formalities of customs and immigration were also completed. Mumbai Police said on Sunday, "A case was registered against 35 Somalian marine accused under IPC sections 307, 364(A), 363, 384, 353, 341, 342, 344(A) 120(B), 143, 145, 147, 148, 149, 438, 427, 506 and 506(2) at Yellow Gate Police Station, Mumbai and they have been arrested." Earlier, the Navy thwarted the piracy attempt on MV Ruen, which was under the control of Somalian pirates. *—ANI*

LADAKH PROTEST

3-day hunger strike begins in Kargil

KARGIL, 24 MARCH

A three-day hunger strike by Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) in support of their four-point demands, including statehood and Ladakh's inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, commenced here on Sunday with people from different walks of life joining the symbolic protest against the Central government.

Separately, the hunger strike led by climate activist Sonam Wangchuk in Leh entered the 19th day as he expressed his displeasure over "breach of trust" from the Union Home Ministry amid deadlock over the talks between representatives of Leh-based Apex Body and the government.

A three-day hunger strike begins in Kargil by KDA **PHOTO: PTI**

KDA and Leh-based apex body, both separate groupings of various political, social and religious organisations representing the two districts, are jointly spearheading the agitation in support of their demands which also included job reservation for local youth and one Rajya Sabha seat.

The agitation was launched shortly after Ladakh was granted UT status without assembly in August 2019.

The entire leadership of KDA along with over 200 volunteers assembled at Hussaini park on Sunday morning and started the three-day hunger strike in solidarity with Wangchuk who has been on climate fast' in Leh since 6 March in support of the demands.

Amid chanting of slogans like "Hollow UT, bureaucracy not acceptable and restore democracy in Ladakh", people from different walks of life including Chief Executive Councillor of Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), Kargil, Jaffar Akhoon attended the hunger strike which was among others attended by co-chairmen of KDA Qamar Ali Akhoon and Asgar Ali Karbalai.

—PTI

BJP files plaint against CM, Hegde for their remarks

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

State BJP unit on Sunday submitted a complaint against Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Udupi-Chikkamagaluru Congress candidate Jayaprakash Hegde to the Chief Electoral Officer of the State for the violation of the code of conduct. Former education minister and MLA Suresh Kumar and former deputy chief minister and MLA CN Ashwathnarayan filed the complaint against Siddaramaiah for his remarks that BJP offered Rs 50 crore to Congress MLAs to commence 'Operation Kamala'. Also, a complaint against Hegde was filed for his comments against his competitor, BJP candidate of Udupi-Chikkamagaluru constituency Srinivas Kota Poojari. Hegde asked people to not vote for Poojari as he knows only Kannada and does not know anything Hindi or English.

—Salar News

LS polls: ₹7 lakh seized from Udyavara

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Election Commission on Sunday seized Rs 7 lakh that was being transported in two cars near Udyavara check post. One car was going towards Udupi from Dharmasthala, while the other was travelling from Mangaluru to Udupi. The occupants of the cars failed to provide suitable documents regarding the source of the cash, leading to its confiscation by the police.In the last 24 hours, the Election Commission reported seizing Rs 6.13 crore in cash, bringing the total cash seizure in Karnataka since the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) came into force on 16 March 16 to Rs 15.78 crore. Since the implementation of the MCC, various enforcement teams have seized Rs 15.78 crore cash, Rs 17.3 lakh worth of freebies, 7.41 lakh litres of liquor valued at over Rs 23.37 crore, 66.34 kg of narcotic substances worth over Rs 65 lakh, and precious metals worth over Rs 43 crore. ***—Salar News***

Mining Baron Gali Janardhan Reddy to join BJP

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Mining Baron and Founder President of Karnataka Rajya Pragathi Paksha Gali Janardhan Reddy will be joining BJP today at their office in Malleshwaram. Reddy on Sunday met with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and announced that he would be joining BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. Reddy started his political journey with BJP as a leader from Bellary and played a major role in BJP-JDS win in 2008. He later became the Tourism minister in the same cabinet. In 2011, Reddy was arrested for illegal mining and stayed away from Bellary politics for more than a decade. He started KRPP in the year 2022.—***Salar News***

4 suspected Naxals spotted near Anekudu village

MANGALURU, 24 MARCH

Information has been received that the suspected Naxals have visited their houses in Anekudu village of Kukke Subrahmanya village in Kadaba taluk of Dakshina Kannada district. A team of three suspects visited villager Ashok's house when it was raining lightly around 6pm on Saturday. It is said that the three suspects talked with the family for more than an hour, and charged their mobile phones before leaving in to forest. Information was found that all the three who came had weapons. In the same area, the Anti-Naxal Force was conducting a continuous search, but the ANF team did not see the suspects. The area visited by the Naxals is close to the Pati Kumari Datta forest of the Kumara Parvata range. It is possible to connect to Kerala through Sampaje within the forest. At present anti naxal force has intensified its search.A week ago, ANF launched a combing operation in the Dakshina Kannada-Kodagu border areas following reports of suspected Naxal movement. Information was received that a group of 8 suspected Naxalites were wandering in the area. —***Salar News***

FM rejects govt charge of fiscal bias

She says, no GST compensation is owed to Karnataka

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday rubbished the Karnataka government's claim that the Centre was not releasing its due share of special grants' as recommended by the 15th Finance Commission.

She denied that there was any recommendation by the Finance Commission. "Karnataka government claims that Rs 5,495 crore special grant was not released to Karnataka and this is totally false. The Finance Commission did not in its final report recommend any such special grant," the Finance Minister claimed.

Sitharaman's statement came a day after Karnataka filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court requesting a direction to the Centre to immediately release grants under the National Disaster Response Fund to the State, which is reeling under acute drought.

In February, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, his deputy DK Shivakumar, Congress MLAs and other Congress leaders at the central level staged a demonstration in New Delhi alleging that the Centre was apathetic towards Karnataka's woes and was not releasing its due share of funds.

"I want to make it a point to tell you in detail that every penny that is due to Karnataka, every paisa that is due to Karnataka, is given, and given on time," Sitharaman said during a talk organised by Thinkers Forum, Jayanagar in the City.

Sitharaman added that Karnataka's share of the GST collection, of Rs 1.06 crore for the period between 2017 and 2022, has been released.

She further stated that as of March 2024, no GST compensation is owed to Karnataka.

In these 10 years of BJP rule, the grants-in-aid have also increased to 273 per cent, which is 3.7 times more than what it was the previous 10 years, she claimed.

The Finance Minister said that between 2004 and 2014, the money received by Karnataka per year was Rs 81,795 crore, which went up to Rs 2,93,226 cr

—Salar News/PTI

Nirmala Sitharaman denied that there was recommendation by the Finance Commission ***PHOTO: PTI***

CM HITS OUT AT BJP ON DROUGHT RELIEF

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday attacked the BJP-ruled Centre for ignoring State's pleas on drought relief. "We had to resort to Supreme Court to demand our rightful share for the drought relief. Despite enduring five months of drought in the State, not a single rupee has been allocated from the State's share of relief. Initially, rice was promised to the people, but instead of delivering the promised relief, they took money and failed to fulfill their commitment."

—Salar News

'DYNASTY POLITICS?'

Giving tickets to kin not dynastic politics, says CM

MYSURU, 24 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday said giving tickets to the children and relatives of ministers was not dynastic politics but acknowledging the recommendation of voters.

In its second list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, Congress on 21 March announced fielding its National President M Mallikarjun Kharge's son-in-law and children of five ministers in Karnataka.

He was replying to a query about 10 family members and relatives of State ministers getting tickets to contest the Lok Sabha polls on behalf of Congress.

Kharge's son-in-law Radhakrishna Doddamani will be in the fray in Gulbarga (Kalaburagi) Lok Sabha constituency.

PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi's daughter Priyanka Jarkiholi will fight from Chikkodi.

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy's daughter Sowmya Reddy will fight against BJP's sitting MP Tejasvi Surya from Bangalore South.

Textile Minister Shivanand Patil's daughter Samyukta S Patil from Bagalkot, Woman and Child Welfare Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar's son Mrinal Hebbalkar from Belgaum (Belagavi) and Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre's son Sagar Khandre from Bidar.

Former Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman K Rahman Khan's son Mansoor Ali Khan has been fielded from Bangalore Central and Minister SS Mallikarjun's wife Prabha Mallikarjun is in the fray from Davangere.

Siddaramaiah ***PHOTO: PTI***

Siddaramaiah said the party will release the list of candidates for the four remaining constituencies in Karnataka in a day or two.

On a question of the party facing a knotty problem' in Chamarajanagar Lok Sabha constituency, he said, "We have neither any knotty problem' nor any conflict. Since we don't want to release the list in one slot, we are doing it later."

He said he will not lie like BJP, which says that it will win all 28 seats in Karnataka, which, according to him, was not possible.

To a question whether the BJP and the JD(S) alliance will cause problems for Congress, Siddaramaiah said, "That (alliance) will favour us."

Noting that his party depends on its achievements in the elections, he said people trust his government, unlike the BJP, which lies and never implements its promises.

—PTI

DV Sadananda Gowda ***PHOTO: PTI***

FAMILY POLITICS SHOULD END IN STATE: SADANANDA

MANGALURU, 24 MARCH

BJP MP DV Sadananda Gowda on Sunday said that the ongoing family politics in BJP State unit should end hinting at BJP senior leader BS Yediyurappa and his family.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks about putting an end to dynasty politics but that should not be only limited to him or Delhi. The fight towards it should be in all the states and till the last position of the hierarchy," said Gowda while addressing the media in Mangaluru.Hinting at other senior BJP leaders Gowda said the leaders here are consumed by corruption, caste politics and family politics. Speaking about losing the ticket to contest from Bengaluru North constituency, Gowda said the party has given him everything and it is time for me to give it back but the state BJP unit does not value loyalty.

"T here is no acknowledgment of my loyalty. It hurts worse than not getting the ticket. I have decided to keep everything to myself until the elections are over. Until then I will support the party. A god man like Modi is trying to change things and we have to give him our complete support," Gowda said.

—Salar News

AHEAD OF POLLS

Bengaluru Central Congress candidate for the Lok Sabha polls. Mansoor Ali Khan met Archbishop of Bengaluru Reverand Peter Machado on Sunday along with Rizwan Arshad MLA Shivaji Nagar and other Congress leaders ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Congress sure of Mysuru-Kodagu, Chamarajanagar

MYSURU, 24 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah expressed unwavering confidence in Congress party's triumph in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in the Mysuru-Kodagu and Chamarajanagar constituencies. Addressing a gathering comprising ministers, ex-ministers, MLAs, former MLAs, district leaders, and office-bearers from Mysuru, Kodagu, and Chamarajanagar, he affirmed that Congress is poised to secure victory in at least 20 constituencies, combining both regions.

Emphasising the significance of reclaiming these Congress strongholds, Siddaramaiah asserted, "Mysuru and Chamarajanagar must return to our hands. Last time, we faced narrow defeats due to unforeseen circumstances. However, this time, there are no pro-BJP factors at play. A robust anti-BJP sentiment is sweeping across the State." He further credited Congress's policies for bringing relief to families affected by BJP's economic policies, asserting the electorate's recognition of Congress's commitment to ensuring peace and prosperity.

Taking aim at BJP, Siddaramaiah criticised the party's lack of substantial achievements during its tenure at the Centre, alleging that BJP's electoral strategy relies solely on showcasing Prime Minister Modi's persona. He pointed out that despite Modi's campaign efforts, Congress emerged victorious with substantial margins in constituencies across the state during the Assembly elections, accusing BJP of resorting to falsehoods to sway voters.

Siddaramaiah denounced BJP's tactics, decrying the propagation of falsehoods aimed at discrediting him, Congress leaders. As the electoral fervour intensifies, Congress remains steadfast in its commitment to upholding truth and securing victory through genuine public support.

—Salar News

Gowda bats for Mekadatu project

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Former Prime Minister and JD (S) patriarch HD Deve Gowda on Sunday batted for Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir Project across Cauvery River, which neighbouring Tamil Nadu has been opposing.

Tamil Nadu contends that the balancing reservoir will take away its share of Cauvery water and hence it has been opposing it. Gowda said the reservoir is necessary to provide drinking water to City and also regulated release of water to Tamil Nadu. He added that the projected population of Bengaluru metropolitan region for 2044 would be about three crore for which the water requirement by lifting from the Cauvery River would be about 72.40 TMC as assessed by Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB).

—PTI

HD Deve Gowda ***PHOTO: ANI***

JD(S) to coordinate with Sumalatha

MANDYA, 24 MARCH

While the JD(S) alliance ticket is firmly in place in Mandya with indications pointing towards the party leader HD Kumaraswamy's candidature, speculation mounts over the next move of sitting MP Sumalatha Ambareesh. According to sources, JD(S) leaders are engaged in strategic negotiations to secure victory in Mandya. Kumaraswamy's decision to contest Mandya comes amidst mounting pressure from local activists.

However, the move has sparked dissent among JD(S) workers in Ramanagara district. Sumalatha expressed her determination to uphold the lotus symbol and contest the elections. However, the allocation of three key constituencies to the JD(S) has left Sumalatha grappling with disappointment.

In a bid to sway Sumalatha's allegiance, Kumaraswamy made overtures during a recent meeting in Mandya, appealing for her cooperation. Mandya's former sitting MLA is also slated to visit Sumalatha soon, signalling efforts to garner her support.

—Salar News

MUDA Commissioner held for demanding bribe

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Lokayukta sleuths have arrested Mangaluru Urban Development Authority Commissioner Mansoor Ali Khan on charges of allegedly demanding a bribe of Rs 25 lakh in exchange for issuing transferable development rights (TDR).

Additionally, a broker named Mohammed Saleem was also apprehended while accepting the bribe.

Lokayukta police revealed that Giridhar Shetty was the owner of a 10.8-acre piece of land situated on survey number 57/P in Kudupu, Mangaluru taluk. Mangaluru City Corporation (MCC) had decided to acquire this land for waste management purposes.

Subsequently, the land was officially registered in the name of MCC in January 2024.

Subsequently, when the complainant met with MUDA commissioner to discuss the issuance of the TDR certificate, the commissioner allegedly demanded a bribe of Rs 25 lakh.

The arrest was made following a complaint filed by Giridhar Shetty of Sagar Courts in Kottara, Mangaluru.

Lokayukta officials said "Saleem was caught red-handed while accepting the bribe amount, and Mansoor Ali has been apprehended during the raid. Lokayukta Police has registered a case under section 7(a) of the Prevention of Corruption Act against the accused and has initiated further investigation into the matter.

—Salar News

IT'S MANGO SEASON

Danger behind artificial ripening of mangoes

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

The vibrant mango season in Bengaluru is back and markets are brimming with the king of fruits. But with this abundance comes the danger of the use of calcium carbide for artificial ripening. This chemical, while speeding up the ripening process, poses health risks to consumers.

Horticulture Department of Karnataka has a clear stance on the issue. Ramesh DS, the Directorate of the Horticulture Department told **Salar News** "Calcium carbide comes in the form of a stone and is illegal and harmful if consumed by us." Calcium carbide works by releasing acetylene gas, thus changing the colour of the fruit. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has banned the use of calcium carbide for ripening fruits. Violators can face penalties under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

"Consumers are deceived by artificial colour. A naturally ripened mango develops a sweet, fragrant aroma, which is absent in carbide-ripened ones. The taste differs too. The carbide-ripened lacks the sweetness and juiciness of naturally ripened ones." says Prakash Mirji the Managing Director of the Karnataka Horticultural Producers Cooperative Marketing Society (HOPCOMS).

—PTI

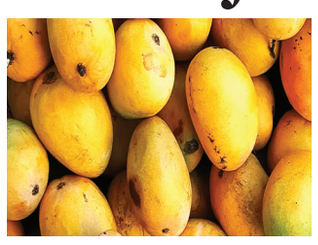


PHOTO: PTI

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Naturally ripened mangoes and artificially ripened mangoes differ from each other- Look for a uniform yellow with a slight green tinge on the stem end. Avoid mangoes with an unnatural, bright yellow colour. A naturally ripened mango will have a sweet, pleasant fragrance. The mango should be slightly soft but firm to the touch. Wrapping the mangoes in paper bags or newspaper and storing them in room temperatures, or leaving them in the sunlight for some hours will aid the ripening process.

—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

JD(U) releases candidate list for Bihar

PATNA, 24 MARCH

JD(U), headed by Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, on Sunday announced candidates for all the 16 Lok Sabha seats it is contesting in the state, dropping two sitting MPs and fielding two turncoats. The announcement was made here by the party's National Vice President Vashishth Narayan Singh in the presence of several other senior JD(U) leaders. The seats where sitting MPs have been dropped are Sitamarhi, where Legislative Council Chairman Devesh Chandra Thakur will be the JD(U) candidate, and Siwan, where Vijay Laxmi Kushwaha got the ticket just a day after she joined the party along with husband Ramesh Singh Kushwaha who was the state president of Rashtriya Lok Morcha, an NDA ally. *—PTI*

4 SP MLAs who voted for BJP in RS polls get Y security

LUCKNOW, 24 MARCH

Four Samajwadi Party MLAs who cross-voted for the BJP in the 27 February Rajya Sabha elections have been allocated Y-category security, a senior government official said on Sunday. The four MLAs who got Y-category security are Abhay Singh (Gosaiganj), Manoj Kumar Pandey (Unchahar), Rakesh Pratap Singh (Gauriganj) and Vinod Chaturvedi (Kalpi). These four MLAs, alongside three other party legislators -- Pooja Pal, Rakesh Pandey and Ashutosh Maurya -- had cross-voted for the BJP in the Rajya Sabha elections, leading to saffron party candidate Sanjay Seth defeating Samajwadi Party nominee Alok Ranjan. Maharaji Prajapati, another MLA, had abstained. As part of the Y-category security, eight CRPF personnel will guard these MLAs. *—PTI*

Cong nominates JNU prof, former MLA in Manipur

IMPHAL, 24 MARCH

Congress has nominated JNU professor Angomcha Bimol Akoijam and former MLA Alfred Kanngam Arthur for the Inner and Outer Manipur Lok Sabha seats respectively in the upcoming polls, an official statement said. The statement, issued by All India Congress Committee (AICC) General Secretary K Venugopal, said that the decision was taken by the Central Election Committee of Congress. Akoijam gained popularity for his academic insights into the ethnic violence that broke out in the state last year. Arthur, a former party MLA, hails from Tangkhul Naga-dominated Ukhrul district. Arthur will fight against Naga People's Front (NPF) nominee. *—PTI*

Industrialist, ex-MP Naveen Jindal joins BJP

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Industrialist and former MP Naveen Jindal quit Congress and joined BJP on Sunday, saying he wants to contribute to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's agenda of 'Viksit Bharat. He joined BJP in the presence of its General Secretary Vinod Tawde, who said Jindal's presence in the party will help the government's agenda of boosting the country's economy and prosperity. Tawde noted that the Jindal Steel Chairperson has a keen interest in sports and education as well. Jindal represented Kurukshetra constituency in Lok Sabha between 2004-14. Speaking to reporters, Jindal said the country has progressed under Modi's leadership in the last 10 years and many historic steps such as the abrogation of Article 370 have been taken. *—PTI*

Tension grows in TMC, BJP over ticket distribution

Many TMC, BJP leaders in WB openly voiced their dejection

KOLKATA, 24 MARCH

Discontentment seems to be increasing by the day in sections of BJP and TMC in West Bengal with several leaders of both camps expressing displeasure over the selection of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Several TMC leaders aspiring for tickets have openly voiced their unhappiness over not being nominated for the seats they eyed. BJP has witnessed similar dissatisfaction among some influential leaders over candidate selection.

At least five senior TMC leaders, including Rajya Sabha MP Mausam Benazir Noor and party spokesperson Santanu Sen, who were seeking nomination from Malda North and Dum Dum seats respectively, have expressed dissatisfaction after being denied tickets.

Even Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's younger brother, Babun Banerjee, voiced his displeasure after not being nominated for the Howrah seat, in which the TMC gave its ticket to sitting MP Prasun Banerjee.

Political analysts believe dissent among lesser-known figures is unlikely to affect the TMC's poll prospects in Bengal *PHOTO: PTI*

Sitting BJP MP from Barrackpore, Arjun Singh, who had previously switched over to TMC two years ago, returned to BJP after being denied a ticket.

Similarly, TMC's four-term MLA and ticket aspirant from Kolkata North, Tapas Roy, joined BJP due to disagreements over the re-nomination of five-term party MP Sudip Bandopadhyay from the seat.

Likewise, BJP, which has announced candidates for 19 of the 42 seats so far, has also encountered embarrassing situations as Union Minister and Alipurduars MP John Barla and Rajya Sabha MP Ananta Maharaj, who have significant influence over Scheduled Tribes and Rajbanshi community respectively, expressed dissatisfaction over the selection of candidates. Both the TMC and BJP, amidst their intense election campaigns, downplayed the discontentment.

"What you are calling discontentment is actually disappointment.But except for Arjun Singh, everybody else is still in TMC and is working for the party," TMC Spokesperson Sukhendu Sekhar Ray said.

While 16 of the 23 sitting MPs were retained, the TMC chose not to re-nominate seven incumbents.

Former cricketer Yusuf Pathan's nomination from the Congress stronghold of Behrampore seat initially sparked an inner-party debate, with TMC's Bharatpur MLA Humayun Kabir criticising the nomination of an "outsider" and contemplating contesting as an independent.

However, after the intervention of the TMC's top brass, Kabir changed his stance and decided to work for the party nominee's victory.

Political analysts believe that while dissent among lesser-known figures is unlikely to significantly affect the TMC's poll prospects, given the party's reliance on the CM's popularity, it could pose a concern for the BJP due to caste dynamics, particularly in north Bengal. *—PTI*

RS 60 CRORE DONATIONS

AAP questions BJP's silence on electoral donor

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

AAP on Sunday questioned BJP on maintaining "silence" over its relationship with Sarath Chandra Reddy, whose companies allegedly donated Rs 60 crore to BJP through electoral bonds.

Reddy of Aurobindo Pharma was arrested by the central agency last November in connection with the excise policy case. No comments were available from Reddy or his company over the charges.

Addressing a press conference, Delhi cabinet minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said, "This is established on the website of Election Commission of India that BJP has recovered donations amounting to Rs 55 crore from the prime accused in the alleged Delhi excise policy, Sarath Chandra Reddy, who was also titled as the kingpin' in the scam, after his arrest."

He asked three questions of BJP at the press conference.

"The first question is how does BJP know Sarath Chandra Reddy? What is the relationship between them? How does BJP know the prime accused of PMLA? Which BJP leaders met him? When and where did they meet? What did they discuss about the transactions?"

"It is not that someone placed a bond of Rs 50 crore at their door, and BJP people opened their office in the morning and suddenly saw Oh, there is a bond!'. The accused must have given the bonds to someone in person, whether a minister or any chairperson," he said.

PHOTO: PTI

- AAP had asked ED on Saturday to file a case against BJP, alleging that BJP received crores of rupees from an accused in alleged Delhi excise policy scam through electoral bonds

The second question is why BJP received donations amounting to a whopping Rs 60 crore from Reddy through his companies, he said.

"The third question: Why did BJP hide all these transactions from everyone? Why did BJP not disclose these facts to ED, CBI, and the citizens of India, if they are not guilty?" he questioned.

AAP had asked ED on Saturday to file a case against BJP, alleging that BJP received crores of rupees from an accused in alleged Delhi excise policy scam through electoral bonds. *—PTI*

DMK MINISTER FACES WRATH

BJP hits out at INDIA bloc over remarks against Modi

NEW DELHI/ CHENNAI, 24 MARCH

Accusing Tamil Nadu minister Anitha Radhakrishnan of making derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP lashed out at INDIA bloc on Sunday, saying the conscience of those in the Opposition alliance "is dead".

K Annamalai, BJP's Tamil Nadu unit president, alleged that DMK leaders have reached a new low in their "uncouth behaviour" and said his party would take up the matter with Election Commission and the Director General of Police seeking the "strictest and immediate action" against Radhakrishnan.

Addressing a press conference in the national capital, BJP leader and Union minister Anurag Thakur strongly condemned Radhakrishnan's remarks against Prime Minister and said there is no place for such language in democracy.

Anitha Radhakrishnan *PHOTO: FB*

Thakur also questioned the silence of Congress over Tamil Nadu minister's remarks against Modi and demanded an apology from INDIA bloc.

"Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi are silent (over DMK leader's remarks)," he said, asking if they are "giving protection to those who want to eliminate Sanatan, abuse Modi ji and talk about breaking his head".

BJP also kept up the heat against Aam Aadmi Party and other constituents of INDIA bloc which are protesting the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money laundering case linked to the alleged liquor policy scam.

Tamil Nadu BJP vice president Narayanan Tirupathi demanded that DMK minister be dismissed from his post and arrested.

He alleged that for the Opposition parties, the letter 'C' in the word democracy stands for "corruption".

Thakur also slammed Kejriwal for running his government from behind bars, saying nothing else could be expected from "those who have sold their morals and are neck deep in corruption". People of Delhi are feeling they have been "cheated" by Kejriwal, he added. *—PTI*

'BJP IS SPREADING FALSE NARRATIVE AGAINST RAHUL'

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday claimed BJP was spreading a false narrative against Congress MP Rahul Gandhi while targeting him over his "Shakti" remark.

In his weekly column "rokhthok" in the party mouthpiece Saamana, Raut said during his Mumbai rally, Gandhi had said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is just a mask and the Opposition has to fight the "Shakti" behind it.

"Gandhi meant 'dhan shakti' (money power) against which the Opposition has to fight. Modi immediately said this was an attack on Hindutva and women's power. People who consider themselves as the avatar of Lord Vishnu were shocked by Gandhi's 'Shakti' attack and started spreading a false narrative against him. There is also a Shakti behind this false propaganda machinery," the Rajya Sabha claimed. *—PTI*

CPI(M) calls for 'bold and united' struggle against BJP

JAMMU, 24 MARCH

Senior CPI (M) leader MY Tarigami on Sunday requested the secular parties in Jammu and Kashmir to come together for a "bold and united" struggle against BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Tarigami, a former legislator, claimed that attempts are being made to politicise the armed forces and said "Such a thing is not good for the country".

"We have to overcome our differences and unite and make BJP pay for its deeds. BJP has not done justice with us and they deserve no confidence," CPI (M) leader said, adding the secular Opposition parties should understand that this is an "existential fight to save democracy".

Asking the people to take a cue from the ongoing agitation in Ladakh where both Leh and Kargil districts came on the same page for their four-point demand, including statehood and sixth schedule of the Constitution, he said "the people of Jammu and Kashmir divisions also need to raise united voice in a democratic way for safeguarding our rights, the future and the identity".

Tarigami said the unity of the people can save the country from the misrule of the present dispensation. *—PTI*

Cong, AAP tie-up against BJP in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, 24 MARCH

Congress-Aam Aadmi Party tie-up in Gujarat is hoping to challenge the electoral hegemony of BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, while the ruling party is confident the Opposition alliance will not affect its prospects.

In the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls, BJP won all 26 seats Parliamentary seats in Gujarat, garnering more than 60 per cent of the vote share in both the elections.

In the 2022 Gujarat Assembly elections, Congress and Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP contested separately, resulting in the division of Opposition votes and leading BJP to a huge win by bagging 156 out of the 182 seats in the state.

BJP received around 51 per cent of the votes, Congress secured 27.5 per cent votes and 17 seats, while AAP got around 13 per cent votes and five seats.

A senior state Congress leader admitted that they lost in more than 40 Assembly seats due to the division of votes between Congress and AAP.

Notably, four Congress MLAs and one AAP legislator in the state have resigned in the last four months.

All 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat will witness polling in a single phase on 7 May and votes will be counted on 4 June.

Under the seat-sharing agreement, Congress will contest 24 seats while AAP will field its candidates in two seats - Bharuch and Bhavnagar.

"We are confident that after 10 years of the BJP's misrule in Gujarat, people will give a chance to other parties," state AAP leader Manoj Sorathiya said.

"The alliance will stop the division of anti-BJP votes. All of us are aware that the Congress lost in more than 40 seats in the 2022 state assembly elections due to the division of votes between the AAP and Congress," Congress Spokesperson Manish Doshi said.Gujarat BJP President CR Paatil has said Congress-AAP alliance will not affect his party's prospects. *—PTI*

DMK, AIADMK, BJP to face-off in Chennai

CHENNAI, 24 MARCH

Home to some top-notch educational institutions and IT companies, the prestigious South Chennai Parliament seat is set for a 3-way direct fight involving two women leaders and a former MP as the ruling DMK, AIADMK and BJP will slug it out in the 19 April Lok Sabha polls.

Incumbent DMK MP T Sumathy alias Tamizhachi Thangapandian will face-off former Telangana governor and BJP leader Tamilisai Soundararajan, while the AIADMK has fielded former-MP Dr J Jayavardhan, who won from here in 2014.

Incidentally, Tamilisai resigned as governor earlier this week before re-joining the saffron party which has nominated her from this segment.

Jayavardhan is banking on the various welfare measures he brought in or initiated during his 2014-19 stint, in health and railway sectors among others, sources close to him said.

The constituency, also home for several residents engaged in the IT sector, entrepreneurs, business leaders among many others, is faced with problems such as waterlogging during the monsoon, as was evident in December 2023, erratic power supply and relaying of roads among many others.

The impact caused by the December rains which resulted in severe flooding threw normal life out of gear. Several videos of parked cars being washed away due to nature's fury emerged in social media platforms.

South Chennai consists of six legislative Assembly segments -- Velachery, Virugambakkam, Saidapet, Thiyagarayanagar, Mylapore and Sholinganallur. *—PTI*

Female voters hold key in 4 tribal seats in J'khand

RANCHI, 24 MARCH

Women voters will play a decisive role in four Lok Sabha seats in Jharkhand, as they outnumber male voters in the electoral roll.

The four Lok Sabha seats where women outnumber male voters are Rajmahal, Singhbhum, Khunti and Lohardaga - all reserved for scheduled tribe (ST) category.

Singhbhum, Khunti and Lohardaga will go to polls on 13 May, while Rajmahal on 1 June, an election official said.

Political parties, mainly BJP and INDIA bloc partners, have already started chalking out strategies to galvanise the support of female voters in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Khunti Lok Sabha seat has the highest number of women voters compared to males in the state. The total number of women electors in the constituency is 6,67,946, while the number of male voters is 6,44,311 out of the total voters of 13,12,261 in the constituency, according to the state electoral roll.

Singhbhum is another tribal Lok Sabha seat where the number of female voters is higher than male. Out of the total voters of 14,32,934, the constituency has 7,27,734 women electors and 7,05,167 male voters.

In Lohardaga Lok Sabha seat, the number of women voters is 7,19,616 against the male electors of 7,07,402. The constituency has a total of 14,27,022 voters. BJP has fielded its Rajya Sabha MP from Jharkhand Samir Oraon, whose term is ending on 3 May, for the Lok Sabha polls, from the seat.

An election official, who was involved in the preparation of the electoral roll, said that they found female sex ratio is higher in several tribal-dominated pockets. "This is one of the reasons. Besides, gender equality is seen in tribal communities and women are equally active as men in these pockets", he said. *—PTI*

KERALA LS POLLS

BJP fields polyglot woman from Kasaragod

KASARAGOD, 24 MARCH

With a jovial smile and friendly demeanour, a young woman candidate can be seen seeking votes from people in multiple languages in Kasaragod, Kerala's northernmost Lok Sabha constituency.

Ashwini ML, the 38-year-old teacher who has been fielded by BJP, effortlessly switches between Malayalam, Kannada and Tulu, while interacting with people in Kasaragod, which is known as the Land of seven languages' with a significant number also speaking Marathi, Konkani, Byari and Urdu.

The Mahila Morcha leader's candidature from BJP came as a surprise, but her linguistic skills are helping her stand out.

Kasaragod, which shares a border with neighbouring Karnataka, is known for its linguistic diversity. According to the 2011 census, 82.07 per cent people here speak Malayalam, 4.02 per cent speak Kannada, 8.08 per cent Tulu and 1.8 per cent Marathi. Around 30,000 and 25,000 people speak Urdu and Konkani respectively.

According to the candidate Ashwini, multilingual skills are a good way to connect with senior citizens and women voters *PHOTO: X/@AshwiniML2*

The winds of change were felt in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls when Congress' Rajmohan Unnithan trumped Sathish Chandran of the CPI(M) by around 40,000 votes. While the former won 4,74,961 votes, the latter managed 4,34,523 with BJP nominee Ravisha Tantri Kuntar getting only 1,76,049.

While contesting against sitting MP Unnithan and ruling CPI (M)'s popular local leader MV Balakrishnan Master, Ashwini believes that her command over multiple languages would help her connect better with the voters, given that linguistic minorities have a significant influence here.

Ashwini said she is also familiar with Tamil, Hindi and English, apart from Malayalam, Kannada and Tulu."It gives me additional confidence during the campaigning," she said.

Born and brought up in Karnataka and growing up among Tamil and Hindi-speaking neighbours, Ashwini has been exposed to multiple languages since her childhood.She said that though she is a Malayali, her parents had settled down in Bengaluru decades ago and she came to Kasaragod a few years ago after marriage.

She said multilingual skills are also a good way to connect with senior citizens and women voters. *—PTI*

Rewari factory blast toll climbs to 14

CHANDIGARH, 24 MARCH

Four workers, who were injured in a boiler blast at a spare parts manufacturing facility in Haryana's Rewari, have died, taking the death toll in the incident to 14, police said on Sunday.While three of them died at the PGIMS, Rohtak on Saturday, one died on Sunday, Inspector Jagdish Chand, SHO of Dharuhera (Rewari) police station, said.The blast took place at the manufacturing facility in Dharuhera industrial area on 16 March, leaving 40 workers injured. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini had on Wednesday met the victims at the hospital.*—PTI*

UP: 4 dead, several injured after truck rams into tractor

RAMPUR, 24 MARCH

Four people were killed and about a dozen injured when a truck rammed into their tractor trolley from behind in the Milak area of this Uttar Pradesh district, police said on Sunday.The incident occurred on the Dharmpur village road late on Saturday, they said.The police are trying to trace the truck driver. The victims were identified as Kavita,18, Tinku Yadav alias Ravi,18, Ramvati ,45, and Savitri ,30, the police said. They were returning to Bareilly from Moradabad, they added.The injured are undergoing treatment in a hospital and their condition is stated to be stable, the police said. *—PTI*

Student arrested under UAPA for 'links with ISIS'

GUWAHATI, 24 MARCH

An IIT-Guwahati student who had allegedly pledged allegiance to ISIS was arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act on Sunday, a senior official said here. The accused Touseef Ali Farooqui, who is a 4th-year student of Bioscience, was detained on Saturday. Assam Police's Special Task Force (STF) Inspector General Parthasarathi Mahanta told PTI that after interrogating him, police found credible evidence of his links with ISIS and he was arrested. "We produced him in the court, which has sent to police custody for 10 days. We also carried out a search in his hostel room inside the IIT-Guwahati campus," Mahanta said. Farooqui who hails from Delhi was arrested under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, he added. On Saturday, he was detained at Hajo in Kamrup district while he was on his way to join ISIS after allegedly pledging allegiance to the terror group. The student was detained three days after the ISIS India head Haris Farooqi alias Harish Ajmal Farukhi and his associate Anurag Singh alias Rehan were arrested.*—PTI*

5 crushed to death by dumper over dispute in R'than

KOTA, 24 MARCH

Two brothers were among five men allegedly crushed to death by a dumper over some dispute in the Pagaria area of Rajasthan's Jhalawar district, police said on Sunday. The alleged incident occurred late on Saturday and the two accused fled the spot after the crime, they added. The victims are siblings Bharat Singh,22, and Dhiraj Singh,20, and Tufan Singh,33, Goverdhan Singh,28, and Balu Singh,20, of the Binnayga Fanta village. The reason behind the dispute is yet to be ascertained, Pagaria SHO Vijendra Singh said.

Bengali Muslims must stop polygamy says, Assam CM

Himanta said multiple marriages are not culture of Assam

GUWAHATI, 24 MARCH

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has asserted that Bengali-speaking Muslims must forsake practices like child marriage and polygamy to be considered 'khilonjiya' indigenous people of the state.

Sarma had also previously held the Bengali-speaking Muslim community of the state, most of whom have roots in Bangladesh, responsible for these social evils.

"Whether 'Miyas' (Bengali-speaking Muslims) are indigenous or not is a different matter. What we are saying is that if they try to be 'indigenous', we have no problem. But for that, they have to forsake child marriage and polygamy, and encourage women education," Sarma said on Saturday.

He said the Assamese people have a culture in which girls are compared to 'shakti' (goddess), and marrying two-three times is not an Assamese culture.

If the Bengali speaking Muslims can follow the Assamese customs, they too will be considered 'indigenous', the Chief Minister added.

The state government had launched an intensive crackdown against child marriage in two phases last year and it was found that many elderly men married multiple times and their wives were mostly young girls, belonging to the poor section of the society, Sarma had said earlier.

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma had asserted that the practise of underage marriage will be eradicated from the state by 2026 *PHOTO: PTI*

In the first phase in February last year, 3,483 people were arrested and 4,515 cases registered while 915 people were arrested and 710 cases registered in the second phase in October.

Sarma had asserted that the practise of underage marriage will be eradicated from the state by 2026 when the next Assembly elections are due.

. In a bid to end child marriage, the state Cabinet had last month also approved a decision to repeal the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorces Registration Act, 1935.

The opposition had termed the decision as a move to polarise voters ahead of Lok Sabha elections and asserted that it will sound the death knell for the BJP government at the Centre.

The Chief Minister had earlier said that the state government was planning to bring a bill to end polygamy in the state in the last budget session of the legislative assembly, but did not do so. An expert committee had submitted a report on the assembly's competence to end polygamy following which 150 suggestions were received regarding the proposed bill to end the social menace in the state. *—PTI*

Assam puts curbs on inter-faith land sale for 3 months

Guwahati, 24 March

The Assam government has stopped selling of lands between two different communities for three months to avoid any possible "conflict on communal lines" ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.Issuing a notification, the Revenue and Disaster Management Authority claimed that the intelligence agencies have informed the government of several cases of attempted transfer of land by fraudulent means in some places. *—PTI*

MOSQUE BODY OBJECTS

ASI continues survey work of Bhojshala complex

DHAR, 24 MARCH

- On 11 March, the Madhya Pradesh High Court directed the ASI to carry out within six weeks a 'scientific survey' of the Bhojshala complex, a medieval-era monument that Hindus believe is a temple of Goddess Saraswati

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) continued the survey of the controversial Bhojshala/Kamal Maula Mosque complex in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district for the third day on Sunday.

The Kamal Maula Mosque Welfare Society President Abdul Samad, one of the parties in the court, told reporters that he has submitted some of his objections.

"Our objection is that the ASI should not include in the survey the objects put up inside Bhojshala after 2003. I have sent my objections through e-mail," he said.

Samad said three ASI teams were working inside the complex.

"I am the only person from the (mosque welfare) society who is inside during the survey. My objection is that the ASI team should work at one place and not at three places," he said. On Sunday morning, a team of the ASI, accompanied by senior police and local administration officials, reached the disputed complex in this tribal-dominated district.

Petitioners from the Hindu side - Ashish Goyal and Gopal Sharma - also reached the Bhojshala complex.

On 11 March, the Madhya Pradesh High Court directed the ASI to carry out within six weeks a 'scientific survey' of the Bhojshala complex, a medieval-era monument that Hindus believe is a temple of Goddess Vagdevi (Saraswati) and the Muslim community calls Kamal Maula Mosque.

As per an ASI order issued on 7 April, 2003, Hindus are allowed to worship inside the Bhojshala complex every Tuesday, while Muslims are allowed to offer namaz at the site on Fridays. *—PTI*

HAPPY COLOURS

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh calls Ladakh, 'Bravery capital' as he celebrates Holi festival with Chief of Army Staff General Manoj Pande and Armed Forces personnel, in Leh, on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

India poised to be premier destination for commercial arbitration: SC judge

PANAJI, 24 MARCH

The quickest and easiest resolution to disputes is through arbitration and mediation, Supreme Court judge Hima Kohli said.

India stands as a reservoir of untapped potential, poised to ascend as a premier destination for commercial arbitration and mediation on the international level, the apex court judge said.

Speaking as the chief guest at the Conference on Ease To Justice Through Arbitration and Mediation in Commercial Disputes organised by the Indian Council of Arbitration (ICA) at Vagator in North Goa on Saturday, she said India is at the forefront of business and global transactions and disputes were bound to arise.

"The quickest and easiest resolution would be through alternate dispute resolutions like arbitration and mediation. The enforcement of the ADR award is imperative to keep the economy buoyant," she asserted.

PHOTO: PTI

The ICA has been propagating the cause of ADR, particularly arbitration and mediation, for a long time and holding such conferences is a way forward, the SC judge said.

"Court litigation has to be the primary focus, but if the alternatives are developed well, it will take the burden off the court. It ensures decision-making and brings a closure between the disputing parties. Nothing can be better than that," she added.

"To address these challenges, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) has emerged as a powerful tool for businesses. ADR is known for its flexibility, efficiency and adaptability, making it valuable for navigating the complexities of global business," she said.

Justice Kohli said with a forward-leaning legislative architecture, a judiciary committed to arbitration enforcement and solid institutional underpinnings fortified by the rule of law, India is increasingly dismantling geographical boundaries through digital technology to facilitate online dispute resolution.

—PTI

PHONE TAPPING CASE: 2 MORE OFFICIALS HELD

HYDERABAD, 24 MARCH

Two more senior police officials have been arrested by Hyderabad Police in connection with the case of phone tapping and destroying certain computer systems and official data.

During investigation, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Thirupathanna and Additional Superintendent of Police N Bhujanga Rao, were arrested, an official release from Hyderabad police late on Saturday night said.

The two police officials had earlier worked as Additional Superintendents of Police in the Special Intelligence Bureau (SIB) and Intelligence Department, respectively.

They were accused of colluding with suspended Deputy Superintendent of Police(DSP) of the SIB, D Praneeth Rao, who was earlier arrested by Hyderabad police for allegedly erasing the intelligence information from various electronic gadgets as well as for alleged phone tapping during the previous BRS regime.

"During the questioning, the two police officials have confessed about their involvement in the reported crimes including conspiracy to monitor private people illegally by developing their profiles abusing their official positions; to cause disappearance of evidence by destroying the public property to conceal their involvement in collusion with the already arrested D Praneeth Kumar alias Praneeth Rao, DSP (under suspension) and some other persons", the release said.

Further investigation is under progress, they said. *—PTI*

Double murder shifts focus to law and order in Budaun ahead of polls

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

The brutal murder of two minor brothers here has become the talking point in the constituency ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, with the Samajwadi Party targeting the BJP over the law and order situation while the saffron party asserting that "rapid police action" resulted in the death of the main accused.

The double murder has altered the political discourse in the constituency.

Terming the murder as a "failure of law and order", Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav said the lives of the two brothers could have been saved.

"The lives could have been saved had the police worked properly. They (BJP government) can't hide their shortcomings, this encounter is not going to hide their failure," Yadav had said.

Shivpal Yadav also attacked the government over the incident. "The incident in Budaun is very saddening but the law and order of the government has failed totally. This becomes clear by incidents like these," Yadav had said.

Maurya, who visited the house of the deceased boys on Wednesday, assured full support to the family members and accused the SP of doing politics over the issue.

"I condemn the murder of the two minor boys. Our family of the BJP is with the grieving family. I would just say to those people who are doing politics on the issue that this is not the time to do so," she said. PTI

—PTI

BUDAUN BOYS' FATHER SETS BIKE ON FIRE, ATTEMPTS TO BURN SELF

BUDAUN, 24 MARCH

The father of the Budaun boys who were killed by a barber in their house set his bike on fire and tried to immolate himself too, upset over the fact the police have yet not been able to ascertain the motive behind the attack.

Vinod Kumar, their father, after setting his bike on fire, tried to immolate himself but was stopped by police.

Vinod's mother Munni Devi said it's been six days since she lost her grandchildren but the police were yet to come up with a motive behind the cruelty.

Senior Superintendent of Police Alok Priyadarshi said, "Seeing their shoes and clothes, he could not stop himself and set fire to his bike to vent his anger."

After the incident, Sajid and Javed, both barbers, were identified as the assailants.

While Sajid was killed in an encounter with police the same day, Javed had on 22 March surrendered at the Satellite Police Outpost of the Baradari Police Station in neighbouring Bareilly district.

—PTI

Holi: Row in Bihar over teachers' training, exams

PATNA, 24 MARCH

A row has erupted over the Bihar education department scheduling a training programme for government teachers and annual examinations for school students on Holi and Good Friday respectively.

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav has sought the intervention of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar into the matter.

A circular issued by the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) on 20 March stated, "Officials concerned must ensure that all primary school teachers (from classes 1 to 5) who have not attended training session earlier, must attend the six-day Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) training that is being organised by the council from 25 to 30 March."

The circular has been sent to the principals of all College of Teacher Education (CTE), District Institute for Education and Training (DIET), Primary Teacher Education College (PTEC), Block Institute for Education and Training (BIET) and other officials concerned.

As per the letter, a total of 19,200 government school teachers will attend FLN training at 78 training centres.

The SCERT has made it clear that "no leave will be granted" to all concerned during the training period.

The Bihar government has already declared public holidays on Holi and Good Friday and all offices of the state government will remain closed on those days.

Similarly, the department's decision to conduct annual examinations for students below class 8 even on Good Friday (29 March) has triggered a controversy.

Even Robert L Chongthu, principal secretary to the Bihar Governor, in a letter to the Chief Secretary, urged him to direct the department to change the exam schedule of 29March.

Both the SCERT circular and the Raj Bhavan letter to the chief secretary are in possession with PTI. *—PTI*

2017 ACCIDENT

Mumbai cop gets ₹30 lakh compensation

MUMBAI, MARCH 24 PTI

A consumer commission here has directed the Axis Bank and the New India Assurance company to pay an insurance claim of Rs 30 lakh along with interest to a policeman who suffered injuries with permanent disabilities after an accident in 2017.

The District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, South Mumbai, in an order passed on 11 March, noted that as per the facts, the bank and the insurance company were in agreement for providing insurance cover to police personnel as per the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the bank and the Mumbai Police.

The policeman's insurance claim has been "arbitrarily rejected/ repudiated", it observed.

It is based on "wrong interpretation" and hence the order of repudiation is found to be unsustainable under the law," the commission said in its order, a copy of which was made available on Sunday.

The bank and the insurance company were in agreement for providing insurance cover to the victim as per the MoU *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

The claimant, Rajesh Pawar, was posted at the Kasturba Marg police station in suburban Borivali (designation not mentioned in the order) at the time of filing the complaint in December 2020.

He claimed that as per an MoU signed between the bank and the police department in 2015, when the personnel open account in the bank, they would be given a Power Salute Debit cum ATM Card, with a personal accident insurance of Rs 10 lakh and air accident cover of Rs 25 lakh.

- He suffered "huge bodily injuries with permanent disabilities" which kept him away from work for almost one year, the complainant said

He suffered "huge bodily injuries with permanent disabilities" which kept him away from work for almost one year, the complainant said.

The bank, in a written response, contended the complainant had raised a "false claim".

The policeman receives his salary every month without interruption. Thus, there is no loss of employment nor any mental or physical harassment, the bank claimed.

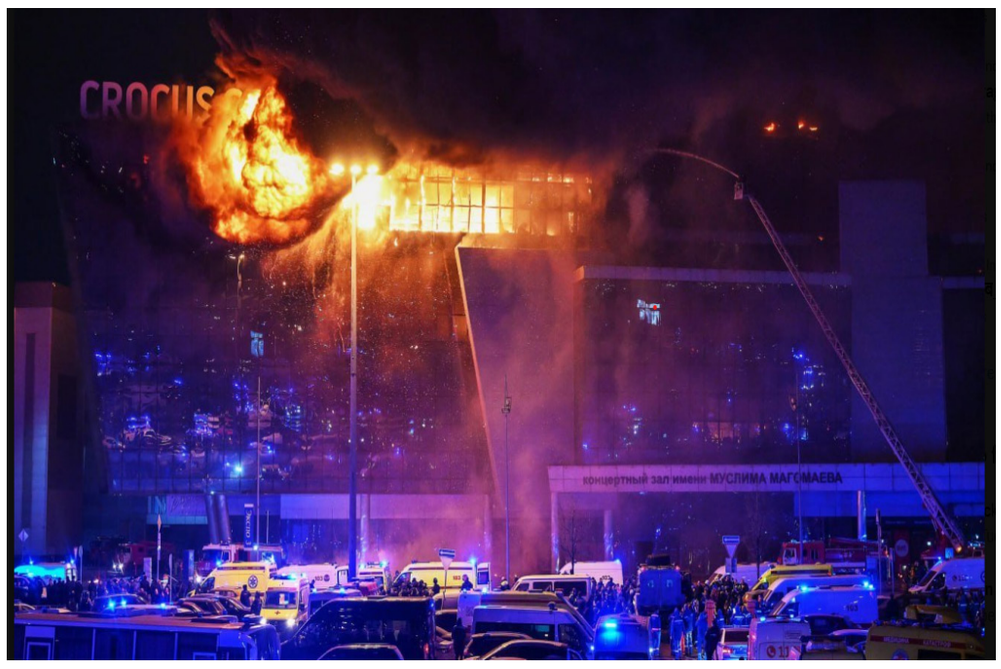
The commission also directed them to pay Rs 2.50 lakh to the policeman towards compensation for mental agony and Rs 25,000 towards the litigation costs.

—PTI

PALM SUNDAY PROCESSION

Roman Catholic clergymen carry palm fronds during the Palm Sunday procession at Church of the Holy Sepulchre, traditionally believed by many to be the site of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus Christ, in Jerusalem's Old City
PHOTO:PTI

Why does IS-led attack on Russia threaten all of us?



ISIS-K had been under pressure from Afghan Speical Forces and American troops ***PHOTO: X/ SPUTNIKINT***

It appears almost certain the brutal assault on a Russian crowd settling down to watch a rock concert in Moscow on Friday night was an Islamist terrorist attack.

At least 133 people were left dead and scores more were injured after gunmen with automatic weapons stormed the Crocus City Hall in Moscow and opened fire, triggering a stampede.

Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, initially through its Amaq media channel and then directly. The modus operandi of the attack also fits with previous Islamic State attacks.

It has been widely reported the attack was the work of Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K), a branch established in 2015 in Afghanistan.

So who is this group, why would they attack Russia and what does this mean for the broader terrorism threat?

What is ISIS-K?

ISIS-K is the Islamic State branch that has most consistently and energetically attempted terrorist attacks across Europe, including in Russia. ISIS-K has planned some 21 attacks in nine countries in the past year, up from eight the previous year.

ISIS-K had been under tremendous pressure from the Afghan Special Forces and American troops before the United States full withdrew from the country in 2021. Although that pressure has continued under Taliban rule, ISIS-K has grown in strength in recent years, with several thousand fighters now operating in almost every one of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

If ISIS-K is indeed responsible for the Moscow attack, we should prepare for further attempted attacks – not just in Russia but across Europe.

Why would they target Russia?

Both Islamic State in general, and ISIS-K in particular, have long proclaimed their intention of striking Russia.

They have cited Russia's earlier military occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s and its long history of crackdowns on Muslim communities in Russia, particularly in the North Caucasus. They have also cited Russia's role in providing a lifeline to the brutal regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

But it was also likely opportunity and personnel that led the group to select a soft target in Moscow, as much as anything else.

The most recent arrests occurred this month when Russian authorities claimed they prevented a planned attack on a synagogue in Moscow.

And last month, a Russian national accused of having Islamic State links was arrested in Poland, while another was arrested working at a nuclear facility under construction in Turkey.

In recent years, the vast majority of successful ISIS-K attacks have been in Afghanistan, with many targeting the minority Shia Muslim Hazara community.

Islamic State carried out multiple attacks in Russia from 2016–19, while several more plots were disrupted from 2021–23.

Many of the ISIS-K militants arrested across Europe, including in Russia, over the past two years have been Russian nationals and people from Central Asia with links to Russia.

What next for Putin and the broader terrorism threat?

Terrorist attacks, including those in brutal regimes like Iran or Russia, are tragic assaults on ordinary people who are not to blame for the politics of policies of the governments they are forced to live under.

When attacked, authoritarian regimes tend to respond with brutal reprisals that are likely to lead to cycles of violence, with less restraint and accountability than is typically the case with counter-terrorism operations in open societies.

Friday night's attack in Moscow was nightmarish, but sadly the horror is likely to be just the beginning.

Regardless of how Putin and the Kremlin choose to respond, the attack comes as a reminder that the threat of terrorism posed by groups like Islamic State and al-Qaeda is now on the rise again. After five years of mostly operating in western Asia, the Middle East and Africa, these groups now pose a renewed threat to the West.

The continued growth of both ISIS-K and al-Qaeda under Taliban rule in Afghanistan should concern us much more than we have been acknowledging.

Friday's attack is a clear reminder we should not look away and continue to wash our hands of any attempt to improve things in Afghanistan. There are no easy answers, but turning away and doing nothing will only make the situation worse. *—The Conversation*

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Dogs understand humans, create mental images: Study

Dogs understands more than what they show ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Known to respond to command words such as "sit", dogs have now been found to conjure up mental representations when they hear known words referring to objects such as a ball, according to a new research that analysed their brain activity. The researchers said it did not matter how many object words a dog understood -- known words activated mental representations anyway.

This suggested that the ability is generally present in dogs and not just in some exceptional canines knowing the names of many objects, they said. "Your dog understands more than he or she shows signs of," said Lilla Magyari from Hungary's Eötvös Loránd University and co-first author of the study published in the "Current Biology" journal.

"Dogs are not merely learning a specific behaviour to certain words but they might actually understand the meaning of some individual words as humans do," Magyari said.

The finding that dogs may have a general capacity to understand words in a referential manner, as humans do, can reshape the way scientists think about humans' uniqueness in using and understanding language, the researchers said.

It also has important implications for theories and models of language evolution, they said.

For the study, the researchers recruited 18 dog owners and had them say words for toys that their dogs knew.

- Dogs ability to understand words depends on them having a large vocabulary of object words and the results showed otherwise.

The dogs were then presented with objects -- sometimes matching the word their owner said and sometimes not -- and their brain's electrical activity was measured.

The brain activity recordings showed differences in patterns when the dogs were shown matching objects against those when shown non-matching ones, the researchers said and added that this was evidence of dogs understanding words.

While the team also thought that dogs' ability to understand words depended on them having a large vocabulary of object words, the results showed otherwise.

"Because typical dogs learn instruction words rather than object names, and there are only a handful of dogs with a large vocabulary of object words, we expected that dogs' capacity for referential understanding of object words will be linked to the number of object words they know; but it wasn't," said Magyari.

The researchers now want to know if this ability to understand words through mental representations is specific to dogs or is present in other mammals as well.

—PTI

Typical dogs learn instruction words rather than object names ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

India in undersea race to mine world's battery metal

In 2022, India collected polymetallic nodules from Indian ocean as part of their trial ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

India is taking another step in its quest to find valuable minerals hidden in the depths of the ocean which could hold the key to a cleaner future.

The country, which already has two deep-sea exploration licences in the Indian Ocean, has applied for two more amid increasing competition between major global powers to secure critical minerals.

Countries including China, Russia and India are vying to reach the huge deposits of mineral resources - cobalt, nickel, copper, manganese - that lie thousands of metres below the surface of oceans. These are used to produce renewable energy such as solar and wind power, electric vehicles and battery technology needed to battle against climate change.

The UN-affiliated International Seabed Authority (ISA) has issued 31 exploration licences so far, of which 30 are active. Its member countries are meeting in Jamaica this week to discuss regulations around giving out mining licences.

If the ISA approves India's new applications, its licence count will be equal to that of Russia and one less than China.

One of India's applications seeks to explore polymetallic sulphides - chimney-like mounds near hydrothermal vents containing copper, zinc, gold and silver - in the Carlsberg Ridge of the Central Indian Ocean.

In response to the other application - to explore the cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts of the Afanasy-Nikitin Seamount in the Central Indian Ocean - the commission has noted that another unnamed country has claimed the seabed area (that India has applied for) as part of their extended continental shelf and asked India for a response.

Whatever the outcome of the applications, one thing is clear: India does not want to fall behind in the race to secure critical minerals from the bottom of the oceans.

"The Indian Ocean promises tremendous potential reserves and that expanse has motivated the government of India to increase its scientific exploration of the ocean's depths," says Nathan Picarsic, co-founder of Horizon Advisory, a US-based geopolitical and supply chain intelligence provider. India, China, Germany and South Korea already have exploration licences for polymetallic sulphides in the Indian Ocean ridge area.

In 2022, India's National Institute of Ocean Technology conducted trials of its mining machine at a depth of 5,270m in the central Indian Ocean basin and collected some polymetallic nodules (potato-shaped rocks that lie on the seafloor and are rich in manganese, cobalt, nickel, and copper).

India's earth sciences ministry did not respond to the BBC's questions on the country's deep-sea mining plans.

The US is not part of the race to mine international waters as it has not ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the agreement which led to the creation of the ISA. Instead, it aims to source minerals from its domestic seabed and process ones mined by its allies from international waters.

Supporters of deep seabed exploration say that mining on land has almost reached a saturation point, resulting in low-quality production, and that many of the mineral source-areas are plagued by conflict or environmental issues.

But environmental campaigners say the deep seabed is the last frontier in the planet that remains largely unstudied and untouched by humanity and mining there could cause irreparable damage, no matter how pressing the need.

Around two dozen countries - including the UK, Germany, Brazil and Canada - are also demanding either a halt or a temporary pause on deep-sea mining, given what they say is a lack of information about the marine ecosystems in those depths.

The World Bank has projected that extraction of critical minerals will need to increase fivefold by 2050 to meet the demand for clean energy technologies.

India has a short-term target of increasing its renewables capacity to 500 gigawatts by 2030, and meeting 50% of its energy requirements from renewables by then, with the long-term goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2070.

To meet these targets, experts say India will need to secure critical minerals from all possible sources including the deep seabed.

Currently, a few countries dominate the production of critical minerals on land. Australia is a major producer of lithium, while Chile is the top provider of copper. China predominantly produces graphite and rare earths (used in smartphones and computers).

But there are geopolitical concerns about China's dominance in processing these minerals before they enter the supply chain.

China - which has honed processing technologies and expertise over decades - currently controls 100% of the refined supply of natural graphite and dysprosium, 70% of cobalt and almost 60% of all processed lithium and manganese, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency.

Moreover, Beijing has banned the export of some of its processing technologies.

"We are up against a dominant supplier that is willing to weaponise market power for political gain," US energy secretary Jennifer Granholm said at a critical minerals and clean energy summit in August 2023.

It's to counter China that the US and several western countries launched the Minerals Security Partnership - to catalyse "investment in responsible critical minerals supply chains" - in 2022. India is now a member.

India has also signed an agreement with Russia to develop deep-sea mining technologies.

"The confluence of rising geopolitical tensions and the energy transition is speeding up the scramble to extract, process and utilise critical minerals," Picarsic says.

—BBC

Afghanistan: 3 children killed in bullet explosion

KABUL, 24 MARCH

At least three children were killed and two more were injured after an unexploded bullet exploded in the Gereshk district in the Helmand province of Afghanistan, Khaama Press reported, citing officials. The office of the governor in Helmand Province stated that the incident occurred in the Laki area of Gereshk district on Saturday morning, when children were playing with the unexploded bullet they found. The casualties of this incident include one girl and two boys who lost their lives and one girl and one boy who were wounded. The wounded have been transferred to the hospital and are undergoing treatment. Notably, unexploded bullets and mines left over from the war in various provinces of Afghanistan occasionally claim victims, especially children. Afghanistan's susceptibility to such incidents is exacerbated by the four decades of conflict in the country. *—ANI*

Greece seizes 3.75M contraband nerve pain drug

ATHENS, 24 MARCH

Greek authorities said Saturday they seized more than three tons of the prescription nerve pain drug pregabalin and impounded a yacht registered in the United Kingdom. The operation took place Thursday night at the port of Lavrio, 70 kilometres (43 miles) southeast of Athens, the coast guard said. On the yacht, the coast guard found 3.75 million capsules of Nervigesic, a brand name used by Indian pharmaceuticals firm HAB Pharma for pregabalin. The capsules were packaged in 500 cardboard boxes weighing nearly 3.15 tons, the statement said. Pregabalin is used to treat nerve pain caused by a variety of conditions, such as diabetes and shingles, and also to treat a type of seizure called partial seizure because it has its origin at a single location in the brain. *—AP*

Bhutto wishes Hindu community in Pak on Holi

ISLAMABAD, 24 MARCH

Pakistan's former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto on Sunday wished the Hindu community in the country on Holi, asserting that the festival serves as a reminder of shared humanity that transcends religious or cultural differences. The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman in a statement highlighted the importance of fostering inclusivity and respect for diverse cultural traditions within the country, The Express Tribune newspaper reported. "Holi serves as a reminder of the shared humanity that transcends religious or cultural differences," he said, pointing out the inherent values of tolerance and acceptance encapsulated by the festival. Asserting that such celebrations foster inclusivity within the nation, he stressed the need for societal cohesion.*—PTI*

Torkham border closed for pedestrians

ISLAMABAD, 24 MARCH

The Torkham border crossing between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been closed for pedestrians after a clash between officials of the Frontier Corps (FC) and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Pakistan-based Geo News reported, citing security sources. The NADRA point at the Torkham border crossing has been closed after the clash and several people travelling to Afghanistan via the border have been stuck, the report said, citing security sources. According to hospital sources, five people have been injured in the scuffle and have been taken to Landi Kotal Hospital for treatment. The condition of the injured is out of danger. FIA has alleged that FC officials were interfering in immigration matters.Sources said, the fight erupted after FC officials continued to interfere despite being told to stop. *—ANI*

Kyiv hit by multiple blasts as Russia strikes Ukraine

20 missiles, 7 attack drone attacks were launched

KYIV, 24 MARCH

Multiple explosions have hit Kyiv and the whole of Ukraine has been placed on alert as Russia launched a wave of air strikes.

The region of Lviv bordering Poland was also targeted and one of the cruise missiles entered Polish airspace, the country's armed forces said. The attacks started in the capital at 05:00 (03:00 GMT). The Ukrainian military said its air defence systems were engaged in repelling the attack.

Serhiy Popko, head of Kyiv's military administration, said about a dozen Russian missiles had been destroyed over the capital and its vicinity. There have been no reports of casualties or major damage as a result of the attacks, he added in a statement on Telegram. Andriy Sadovyi, Lviv's mayor, said on Telegram that the city itself had not been hit. However, around 20 missiles and seven attack drones had been launched against the broader Lviv region, targeting "critical infrastructure".

Ukraine was earlier placed under nationwide alert that warned of cruise missiles being launched from Russian strategic bombers. Meanwhile, Poland said its airspace had been violated by one of the cruise missiles launched by Russia.

A bomb squad work on part of a downed missile in Kyiv *PHOTO: BBC*

- Serhiy Popko, head of Kyiv's military administration, said about a dozen Russian missiles had been destroyed over the capital and its vicinity

"The object entered Polish space near the town of Oserdow and stayed there for 39 seconds. During the entire flight, it was observed by military radar systems," the armed forces said in a statement. Residents in the Ukrainian capital have been pictured taking shelter in metro stations.

It comes after Russia fired dozens of missiles on Friday, hitting a dam and leaving a million Ukrainians without power. Moscow has not yet commented on Sunday's strikes.

The Russian-installed governor of the port of Sevastopol, in annexed Crimea, said Russian forces had shot down 10 Ukrainian missiles over the city late on Saturday. An office building and a gas line were destroyed and a woman suffered a shrapnel injury, Mikhail Razvozhayev said on Telegram. *—BBC News*

AFTERMATH OF LANDSLIDE IN RIO

At least 12 people lost their lives in floods and landslides triggered by relentless rainfall in Brazil, officials said on Sunday. Heavy rains mainly in Petropolis, Rio de Janeiro, and the neighbouring state of Espirito Santo impacted the southeastern region and led to numerous incidents, including landslides and house collapses *PHOTO: PTI*

It's time to 'truly flood' Gaza with aid: UN Chief

RAFAH CROSSING, 24 MARCH

UN Secretary-General António Guterres stood near a long line of waiting trucks Saturday and declared it was time to "truly flood Gaza with lifesaving aid," calling the starvation inside the enclave a "moral outrage." He urged an immediate cease-fire between Israel and Hamas.

Guterres spoke on the Egyptian side of the border not far from the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where Israel plans to launch a ground assault despite widespread warnings of a potential catastrophe.

More than half of Gaza's population has taken refuge there. "Any further onslaught will make things even worse — worse for Palestinian civilians, worse for hostages and worse for all people in the region," Guterres said.

António Guteres *PHOTO: PTI*

He spoke a day after the UN Security Council failed to reach consensus on the wording of a U.S.-sponsored resolution supporting "an immediate and sustained cease-fire." Guterres repeatedly noted the difficulties of getting aid into Gaza, for which international aid agencies have largely blamed Israel.

"Here from this crossing, we see the heartbreak and heartlessness … a long line of blocked relief trucks on one side of the gates, the long shadow of starvation on the other," he said.

About 7,000 aid trucks are waiting in Egypt's North Sinai province to enter Gaza, Gov. Mohammed Abdel-Fadeil Shousha said in a statement.

Guterres added: "It is time for an ironclad commitment by Israel for total … access for humanitarian goods to Gaza, and in the Ramadan spirit of compassion, it is also time for the immediate release of all hostages."

He later told journalists that a humanitarian cease-fire and hostage release should occur at the same time. *—AP*

US: BIDEN, TRUMP GEAR UP FOR REMATCH

Donald Trump *PHOTO: PTI*

WASHINGTON, 24 MARCH

Former US president Donald Trump, continuing his winning streak in the race to the White House, registered victory in the Republican primaries in the state of Louisiana and Illinois on Saturday (local time), The Hill reported, citing Decision Desk HQ projections.

President Joe Biden won the Louisiana Democratic presidential primary, according to the projection from Decision Desk HQ. As per the latest projections, both Trump and Biden are expected to win with over 88 per cent of votes.

There are a total of 47 delegates in the state of Louisiana. Trump carried Louisiana in the 2020 election, bringing in 58 percent of the vote, over Biden's 40 percent. He also won the state in 2016 against former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, The Hill reported.

Earlier this week, Trump also won the Illinois Republican primary.

Notably, Trump has already achieved the required delegate threshold he needs to secure the Republican nominations, and his wins only add to his winning streak on the GOP side.

Trump clinched the Republican nomination for president on March 13, while Biden secured the Democratic nomination a day before.

The long-anticipated rematch of Trump and Biden is expected to mirror the 2020 campaign, though Trump will run this time under the spectre of 91 felony charges related to allegations that he plotted to overturn his 2020 election defeat, CNN reported. *—ANI*

DEMAND SUBSIDY SCHEME

Kissan Ittehad Chairman Bath demanded the restoration of the previously announced Pakistani currency 1.8 trillion package *PHOTO: ANI*

Farmers demands agricultural emergency in Pak

ISLAMABAD, 24 MARCH

Pakistan Kissan Ittehad (PKI) has urged the federal government on Saturday to declare an agricultural emergency in the nation, ARY News reported.

In a statement, Kissan Ittehad Chairman Khalid Hussain Bath demanded the restoration of the previously announced Pakistani currency (PKR) 1.8 trillion package for farmers, initially proposed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

According to ARY News, Bath warned of potential protests post-Eidul Fitr if the government fails to address the grievances.

He stated that "the farmers will begin a protest after Eidul Fitr if the government fails to address the issues of the community. A sit-in will be staged in Islamabad if needed."

Additionally, he lamented the hike in the price of fertilisers, saying that the farmers were buying urea for Rs 6,000 per bag, as per ARY News.

He expressed dismayed over the lack of a coherent government policy for the agricultural sector.

Additionally, Kissan Ittehad President Mian Umer criticized Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz stating, "he has not conducted a single meeting on the agriculture sector." He criticised the Punjab Chief Minister for purportedly neglecting the agricultural sector, he claimed that the "sugar mafia" has not paid farmers after buying sugarcane from them.

Umer also lamented the adverse impact of increased electricity prices on farmers, stating that they now pay Rs 54 per unit.

He said that the government was forcing the community to come out on the street and shut down the city. *—ANI*

SENEGAL ELECTION 2024

Voters gather at a polling station in Dakar early on Sunday morning just as it opened *PHOTO: AL JAZEERA*

Millions vote in hotly contested polls

DAKAR, 24 MARCH

Voting opened in Senegal on Sunday in a delayed presidential election taking place against a turbulent political backdrop that has triggered violent anti-government protests and boosted support for the opposition.

Seventeen candidates are on the ballot, each hoping to replace President Macky Sall who is barred from running again after reaching the two-term limit. The election had been due to take place last month but Sall postponed it, triggering deadly opposition protests and a democratic crisis. Senegal had until then been praised as a bastion of democracy in West Africa.

Seven million people are eligible to vote in Sunday's election. Among those in the running for Senegal's top job is the governing BBY coalition's candidate, former Prime Minister Amadou Ba, 62.

His strongest challenger is seen as Bassirou Diomaye Faye, 44, who was released from jail just last week, after being detained since April 2023 on charges of insurrection, which he said were politically motivated.

Popular firebrand Ousmane Sonko, who was also imprisoned until last week on what he said were trumped-up charges, is not allowed to stand. He and his now-disbanded Pastef party are backing his close ally, Faye.

Speaking to BBC earlier this week, Sall said that he had "no apology to make" for postponing the election, which was originally due to be held on 25 February. "I have done nothing wrong," he said, adding that the decision to delay the vote was not taken unilaterally, but was due to electoral concerns raised by members of parliament.

"All the actions that have been taken have been within the framework of the law and regulations." *—BBC News*

Lanakan main bank to rethink disputed pay hike

COLOMBO, 24 MARCH

Sri Lanka's central bank on Sunday agreed to revise a disputed steep pay hike following a parliamentary committee's recommendation to put on hold its implementation.

On Wednesday, the Commission on Public Finance (COPF) recommended the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) to put on hold the implementation of the controversial steep pay hike, which saw salary hikes ranging from 29 to 76 per cent across all grades to the Central Bank staff. The COPF also asked for the hike's review by an independent remuneration committee.

"In response to this situation, a majority of the senior management and professionals of CBSL made a collective decision to consider a revision to their salaries," the bank said in a statement. "This decision was communicated to the Committee on Public Finance (COPF) on 16th March 2024, prior to and independent of the recommendations made by COPF," it said.

The CBSL said that it employs experienced and professional staff under its wing and the recent salary revision was made to retain its experienced staff to function at its full capacity. The COPF made the recommendations after examining the central bank's action to affect the steep salary hike outside Parliament's control of public finances. *—PTI*

KURIGA KIDNAPPING

More than 280 Nigerian pupils released

ABUJA, 24 MARCH

More than 280 Nigerian pupils abducted in the north-western town of Kuriga earlier this month have been released "unharmed", officials say.

Kaduna state governor Uba Sani did not give details of the release, days before a deadline for ransom demanded by the abductors. The children, aged eight to 15, and one teacher, were abducted on 7 March. Kidnap gangs, known as bandits, have seized thousands of people in recent years, especially in the north-west.

However, there had been a reduction in the mass abduction of children over the past year until this week. Those kidnapped are usually freed after a ransom is paid. This time, militants had demanded $690,000 (£548,000). The government had said it would not pay any ransom.

The details of the release not yet given by the government *PHOTO: UNICEF*

In his statement, governor Sani praised Nigeria's President Bola Tinubu "for ensuring that the abducted Kuriga schoolchildren are released unharmed". "The Nigerian Army also deserves special commendation for showing that with courage, determination and commitment, criminal elements can be degraded and security restored in our communities," Mr Sani said. The mass abduction occurred on the morning of 7 March during school assembly. According to witnesses, the pupils were in the assembly ground around 08:30 (07:30 GMT) when dozens of gunmen on motorcycles rode through the school, eventually taking away 187 students from a secondary school and 125 from the local primary school. *—BBC News*

'Tata Group will move to 70% green energy by 2030'

JAMSHEDPUR, 24 MARCH

Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran on Saturday said the conglomerate will move to 70 per cent green energy by 2030. He was addressing the convocation of XLRI-Xavier School of Management in Jamshedpur where he was honoured with the Sir Jehangir Ghandy Medal for Social and Industrial Peace. "Nation-building impulse is as relevant now as it was earlier. There are major energy transitions, digital transitions in the form of AI and machine learning, and supply chain transitions that we are facing today. But, India is uniquely placed because we can invest in each of these transitions today because of the geo-political advantages that our country has," he said. He said that by 2030, the Tata Group will move to 70 per cent green energy. *—PTI*

SSEL aims to start op in new plant in Jul-Sep qtr

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Transformers maker Shirdi Sai Electricals Ltd (SSEL) looks to start operations at its new Rs 300 crore unit in Andhra Pradesh by the September quarter, its CMD N Viseswar Reddy said. SSEL is setting up a facility to manufacture conductors in the YSR District of Andhra Pradesh at an investment cost of Rs 300 crore, Reddy said. The plant having an annual capacity of 300 tonnes is being set up over 8 acres, he said, The plan is to make the plant operational by the July-September period of 2024-25. The plant is being set up in two phases. The trial production will begin by the end of this month, while the peak capacity of phase 1 (200 tonnes) will be achieved in the first quarter of the next fiscal year. *—PTI*

Bharti Hexacom IPO to open on 3 April

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Telecom operator Bharti Airtel's subsidiary Bharti Hexacom's initial share sale will open for public subscription on 3 April. The three-day initial public offering (IPO) will conclude on April 5, and the anchor book of the offer will open for a day on April 2, according to the Red Herring Prospectus filed on Friday. This will be the first IPO in the financial year 2024-25. Bharti Hexacom obtained its observation letter on 11 March from SEBI to float the public issue. Promoter Bharti Airtel holds a 70 per cent stake and the remaining 30 per cent shareholding is held by state-run Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd. In spite of strong topline and operating figures, the company reported a 67.2 per cent year-on-year fall in net profit of Rs 549.2 crore for FY23. This decline was caused by a larger base as a result of exceptional gains of Rs 1,951.1 crore in the previous year. *—PTI*

DPI, tax code make India investment destination: WEF

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

A combination of policy changes such as bankruptcy law and taxation code and the enabling environment created by the digital public infrastructure has made India an attractive investment destination for the financial technology sector, a senior World Economic Forum (WEF) official said. In a video interview with PTI, Matthew Blake, Head of the Centre for Financial and Monetary Systems at the WEF said India has been one of the best-performing markets in the world and investors have made money here. Blake also struck a word of caution saying that since markets do not move in a purely linear fashion and were prone to "ups and downs", there was a need to educate investors. Blake said a survey of fintech CEOs by the WEF and the Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance had revealed that 70 per cent of the firms considered AI as a major force and could be deployed for personalisation and customisation of products and services. *—PTI*

FPIs infuse over ₹38K cr in equities in March

It comes following an investment of ₹1,539 crore in February

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

FPIs have shown a significant resurgence in their investment activity within the Indian equity markets this month, injecting over Rs 38,000 crore, mainly driven by favourable shifts in the global economic scenario and strong domestic macroeconomic outlook.

The investment came following a modest investment of Rs 1,539 crore in February and a massive outflow of Rs 25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories snowed.

With this, foreign portfolio investors' (FPIs) investment has turned positive to the tune of Rs 13,893 crore in equities so far in 2024 and Rs 55,480 crore in the debt market.

Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director at Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India, highlighted that FPIs have become significant buyers in March. The improved global economic conditions and positive Indian macroeconomic scenario have driven FPIs to invest in high growth-oriented markets like India.

Influx of FPIs can be attributed to robust GDP growth *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

Additionally, the recent market correction has provided a buying opportunity.

Further, the influx of FPIs can be attributed to robust GDP growth and expectations of a potential shift in the RBI's policy, possibly leading to rate cuts of 25-50 basis points in the latter half of fiscal 2025, experts believe.

However, last week, FPIs turned net sellers, although marginally, to the tune of USD 314 million. This could be largely attributed to FPIs adopting a cautious approach.

Apart from equities, FPIs have injected a massive Rs 13,223 crore into the debt market this month (till March 22). This came in the backdrop of Bloomberg announcing India's bonds inclusion in its Emerging Market (EM) Local Currency Government Index and related indices from January 31 next year.

Moreover, FPIs have been investing in the debt markets for the past few months. They invested Rs 22,419 crore in February and Rs 19,836 crore in January.

Further, FPI inflows into debt are likely to continue going forward.

However, a sharp surge in debt flows is unlikely since the US bond yields have also risen in recent days, he added.

—PTI

BOOSTING EV SECTOR

India's auto component imports were USD 20.3 billion in 2022-23 of which 30 per cent came from China *PHOTO: PTI*

India's EV push may lead to entry of Chinese firms

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

The Indian government's push to boost domestic manufacturing of electric vehicles (EVs) may lead to large-scale entry of Chinese auto firms in the local market, a report by think tank GTRI said on Sunday.

China's automotive industry, buoyed by substantial state support, has grown rapidly in electric vehicle technology, making it a leading exporter of EVs and related components, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said.

The renewed policy push to make India a hub for e-vehicle manufacturing and efforts of the private sector will lead to a sharp increase in dependence on auto component imports from China, the report said.

India's auto component imports were USD 20.3 billion in 2022-23 of which 30 per cent came from China. India's auto component imports were USD 20.3 billion in 2022-23 of which 30 per cent came from China.

As the EVs are getting greater focus in the country, the auto component imports from China may increase further because it has a greater hold over the EV components' global supply chain.

According to estimates, China has 75 per cent of the world's battery production capacity and battery accounts for 40 per cent of the cost of an EV.

It also accounts for more than 50 per cent of global EV production and exports.

The report said that in the "next few years, every third electric vehicle and many passenger and commercial vehicles on India roads could be those made by Chinese firms in India alone or through Joint Venture with Indian firms". GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said that Indian market entry provides a much-needed relief to Chinese firms.

JSW MG Motor India, a joint venture (JV) between China's SAIC and Indian conglomerate JSW Group, has recently announced an investment of Rs 5,000 crore to enhance production capacity and launch one new car every 3-6 months starting September.

The JV aims to sell one million units of passenger electric vehicles in India by 2030 when the total market is expected to be 10 million units annually. MG Motor is a British brand owned by Shanghai-headquartered SAIC Motor.

As per the report, the automobile industry in India contributes 7.1 per cent to the country's GDP, up from 2.8 per cent in 1992-93.

—PTI

SYNERGISING BIZ OPS

the appointed date of the plan of merger is 1 April *PHOTO: X*

Tech Mahindra plans to merge two US-based subsidiaries

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

- Turnover of BORN and TMA for the financial year ended 31 March 2023 is USD 55.08 million and USD 1,201.37 million respectively

IT services and consultation company Tech Mahindra said it plans to merge its two wholly-owned subsidiaries, Born Group and Tech Mahindra (Americas), to synergise business operations, optimise operational cost, and reduce compliance risks.

The merger is subject to regulatory approvals in the country of incorporation. According to a regulatory filing, the appointed date of the plan of merger is 1 April.

While BORN specializes in providing Brand strategy, visual design, brand identity exploration, and more for digital products, mobile apps, and physical products in the US, TMA provides computer consulting, programming support services and IT Management & Consulting Services.

Tech Mahindra (Americas) (TMA) is a wholly owned material subsidiary of the company. BORN is a wholly owned subsidiary of TMA and a step-down wholly owned subsidiary of the company.

According to the filing, the turnover of BORN and TMA for the financial year ended 31 March 2023 is USD 55.08 million and USD 1,201.37 million respectively.

"The business of both entities BORN and TMA are complimentary hence consolidation of entities will result in synergy of business operations, optimize operational cost and reduce the compliance risk," the company said.

It added that there will be no cash consideration or issue of new shares involved under the Plan of Merger. The investment of TMA in BORN will get cancelled on the merger becoming effective. The shareholding pattern of the company will remain unchanged.

—PTI

Vedanta to infuse $6B investment across biz

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

Mining conglomerate Vedanta Ltd will invest USD 6 billion across businesses that span from aluminium and zinc to iron ore, steel and oil and gas as it looks to add at least USD 2.5 billion to annual EBITDA, its executives said in an investor meeting.

It has a pipeline of more than 50 active projects and expansions to drive growth, which is expected to generate incremental revenue of over $6 billion and boost EBITDA from an expected $7.5 billion by FY27, they added.

Vedanta Chairman Anil Agarwal, according to a presentation made at the investor meeting, said the company "will get to a different level in the next 25 years".

His brother and vice chairman Naveen Agarwal gave details of the plans.

"Projects (are) under execution to deliver $7.5+ billion yearly EBITDA," he said, adding $6 billion is being invested across business verticals that will potentially yield incremental revenues of $6 billion and "incremental yearly EBITDA potential of $2.5-3 billion".

Stating that deleveraging was its "utmost priority", it said a USD 3 billion deleveraging over the next three years has been firmed up at parent Vedanta Resources without an increase in debt levels at the India-listed firm.

Net debt is being targeted to be cut to USD 9 billion by FY27 from USD 13 billion now, its CFO Ajay Goel said, adding parent Vedanta Resources has de-leveraged balance sheet by USD 3.5 billion in the last two years to bring down net debt to USD 6 billion.

—PTI

INDIA HAS AFFORDABLE AIRFARES: AKASA

MUMBAI, 24 MARCH

India has "incredibly affordable" airfares and the country's aviation market has the kind of growth potential where Akasa Air as well as other carriers can do well, according to the nearly two-year-old airline's chief Vinay Dube.

As Akasa Air prepares to take the international skies on 28 March with the first overseas flight from Mumbai to Doha, Dube also asserted that the airline is not about "marketing gimmicks". It is aiming to be among the world's top 30 airlines by 2030 and will go public in future. Acknowledging that aviation competition has always been intense, he said that as long as the focus is on fundamentals, there is enough room not just for Akasa Air to thrive in the future but for others as well.

The carrier, which started flying in August 2022, has a fleet of 24 planes and a domestic market share of 4.5 per cent. *—PTI*

Mother Dairy expects 30% demand surge for milk products

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

Mother Dairy will launch this summer 30 new products, mainly in ice cream and yoghurt categories, as it expects a 25-30 per cent increase in consumer demand, a top company official said.

Mother Dairy, a leading milk supplier in Delhi-NCR, has nine company-owned dairy processing plants with a total capacity of more than 50 lakh litres per day.

In an interview with PTI, Mother Dairy Fruits and Vegetables Pvt Ltd MD Manish Bandlish said, ''Summer is the most anticipated season for our business, especially for categories like ice creams, curd and beverages''. ''With the Indian Meteorological Department's (IMD) prediction of above-normal temperatures and a hot summer this year, we are expecting a multifold surge in demand for these categories,'' he added.

''As we get into the season, we are all geared up to excite consumers in our golden jubilee year with an array of over 30 new delightful products. The upcoming range will feature around 20 new ice cream products, followed by Greek yoghurts and other dairy products,'' Bandlish said.

The company will invest Rs 650 crore to set up two new plants for processing milk and fruits and vegetables *PHOTO: X*

Overall, he said the company is very optimistic about the season.

Mother Dairy has also announced its expansion plan for dairy and fruits and vegetables (F&V) businesses.

The company will invest Rs 650 crore to set up two new plants for processing milk and fruits and vegetables.

Mother Dairy is coming up with a big dairy plant in Nagpur with an investment of around Rs 525 crore.The company also has a diversified portfolio with products in edible oils under the 'Dhara brand and fresh fruits & vegetables, frozen vegetables & snacks, unpolished pulses, pulps & concentrates, etc. under the 'Safal brand. *—PTI*

MISUSE OF TECH

Penalty for development of deepfakes

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in the advisory issued to intermediaries and platforms warned of criminal action in case of non-compliance

Penalty provisions can act as a deterrent to the development and dissemination of deepfakes and misinformation, a senior official of global think tank Cuts International said while calling for the deployment of technology interventions to check misuse of AI-generated content.

CUTS International, Director, Research, Amol Kulkarni said that internet users would require adequate opportunities to verify the genuineness of content and it becomes important during the election season while the role of credible fact-checkers and trusted flaggers becomes crucial.

He said that while the government advisory on March 15 removes permission requirements, it continues to rely on information disclosures to users for making the right choices on the Internet.

"Though transparency is good, information overload and 'pop-ups' across user journeys may reduce their quality of experience. There is a need to balance the information requirements, with other implementable technological and accountability solutions which can address the problem of deepfakes and misinformation," Kulkarni said.

After a controversy over a response of Google's AI platform to queries related to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government on 1 March issued an advisory for social media and other platforms to label under-trial AI models and prevent hosting unlawful content.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in the advisory issued to intermediaries and platforms warned of criminal action in case of non-compliance.

The previous advisory has asked the entities to seek approval from the government for deploying under trial or unreliable artificial intelligence (AI) models and deploy them only after labelling them of "possible and inherent fallibility or unreliability of the output generated".

Kulkarni said that addressing the issue of deepfakes and misinformation will require clarifying the responsibility of all stakeholders in the internet ecosystem: developers, uploaders, disseminators, platforms and consumers of content. *—PTI*

RBI to conduct audit for regulatory breaches

NEW DELHI, 24 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

IIFL Finance Ltd and JM Financial Products Ltd (JMFPL) will undergo a special audit to further probe their regulatory breaches, as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has initiated the process for the appointment of auditors. The Reserve Bank has floated two separate tenders for the appointment of auditors for special audits of these two non-banking finance companies.

Earlier this month, RBI put a curb on these two entities for non-compliance of regulatory guidelines.

RBI barred IIFL Finance from sanctioning or disbursing gold loans after certain material supervisory concerns were observed in its gold loan portfolio.

A day after, RBI imposed restrictions on JM Financial Products Ltd following the finding that the company indulged in various manipulations. The central bank barred the systemically important non-deposit-taking NBFC from providing any kind of financing against shares and debentures. *—PTI*

RR beat LSG by 20 runs to make a winning start

Gujarat Titans beat Mumbai Indians by 6 runs in a last-over thriller

JAIPUR, 24 MARCH

Rajasthan Royals beat Lucknow Super Giants by 20 runs to make a winning start to their IPL campaign in Jaipur.

For RR, skipper Sanju Samson smashed an unbeaten 82 in 52 balls in their total of 193 for four. In reply, Nicholas Pooran's unbeaten 64 off 41 balls went in vain as LSG finished on 173 for 6.

Skipper KL Rahul made a sedate 58 off 44 balls, eating up a lot of deliveries Earlier, Rajasthan Royals scored a massive 193/3 against Lucknow Super Giants at Sawai Mansingh Stadium, Jaipur.

The hosts have given a good target to LSG and the KL Rahul side needs some strong performances to chase the target under the lights. After losing Yashasvi Jaiswal, RR skipper Sanju Samson took charge of his team's innings and slammed his 21st half-century.

Sanju Samson-GT registered a narrow victory **PHOTO: PTI**

Brief scores:

Rajasthan Royals: 193/4 20 overs (Sanju Samson 82 not out, Riyan Parag 43) beat LSG 173/6 (Nicholas Pooran 64 not out, KL Rahul 58, Trent Boult 2/35).

It edged out **Gujarat Titans** by six runs at the Brabourne Stadium, much to the delight of its loyal fans, who have had very little to cheer about this IPL season. When openers Wriddhiman Saha (55, 40b, 6x4, 2x6) and Shubman Gill (52, 36b, 6x4, 2x6) put on 106 in 12 overs, Titans seemed well on track to chase down Mumbai's 177 for six and to post its ninth victory in 11 matches.

Though they were both sent back in the very next over by M. Ashwin, the odds were still with Titans, given the hard-hitting batters in the line-up. When skipper Hardik Pandya (24, 14b) was run out in the 18th over, the equation came down to 20 off the last two overs.

Jasprit Bumrah's penultimate over was spoiled by David Miller's six over mid-wicket.

That left the Titans needing nine from the final over.And what a last over it proved to be from Daniel Sams. He gave away just three in it. After the danger man Rahul Tiwatia was run out, Titans needed six off the last two balls.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

Mohammad Amir comes out of retirement

KARACHI, 24 MARCH

Controversial Pakistan left-arm pacer Mohammad Amir has decided to come out of international retirement and make himself available for selection for the upcoming T20 World Cup in the Americas in June. Amir, who was banned from cricket for five years between 2010 to 2015 on spot-fixing charges and was also briefly jailed for his crime, retired in 2021 from all forms of international cricket. However, he has kept on playing in T20 leagues across the globe and now the new PCB regime under chairman Mohsin Naqvi has convinced him to take back his retirement. "I still dream of playing for Pakistan! life brings us to the point where at times we have to reconsider our decisions. There have been few positive discussions between myself and the PCB where they respectfully made me feel that I was needed and can still play for Pakistan," Amir wrote on 'X'.The left-arm speedster, who last played for Pakistan in a T20I in Manchester in August 2020.*—PTI*

PHOTO: AFP

Messi-less Inter Miami thrashed by New York Red Bulls

LONDON, 24 MARCH

Inter Miami coach Gerardo Martino slammed his star-studded team's mentality on Saturday after a brutal 4-0 thrashing by New York Red Bulls. Miami, missing the injured Lionel Messi, was torn apart at New York's Red Bull Arena as former Inter player Lewis Morgan scored a superb hat-trick. While Martino accepted his share of the blame for the mauling, the veteran coach pointed the finger at his players, who included high-profile signings Luis Suarez, Sergio Busquets, and Jordi Alba."There is not much to say, except that we were outmatched from start to finish," Martino said following the drubbing. "Red Bulls had the desire to win and we had no desire to compete."When a team enters a game without the desire to win, without spirit, without competing, and the other side just wants to win the game, they are going to win it."Martino meanwhile refused to blame the absence of Messi for the loss, noting that the team had produced a 3-1 victory at D.C. United.*—AP*

PHOTO: AFP

Indian football has improved in the last decade: Ashley

GUWAHATI, 24 MARCH

Afghanistan football coach Ashley Westwood on Sunday said Indian football has improved significantly in the past decade owing to the players improving their fitness and getting the right 'conditioning'. Westwood said the Indian players are fitter compared to the past and have also been able to increase their time spent on the field. "Ten years ago when I came here, compared to that, (the Indian) football has improved significantly," Westwood told *—AP*

Swiss Open 2024: Kidambi Srikanth falls short in s/fs; Indian challenge ends

BASEL, 24 MARCH

Kidambi Srikanth's Swiss Open 2024 badminton campaign came to an end in the men's singles semi-finals at the St. Jakobshalle arena in Basel, Switzerland on Saturday.

Up against world No. 22 Lin Chun-Yi of Chinese Taipei, Srikanth, 27th in the badminton rankings, suffered a 21-15, 9-21, 18-21 loss in the last-four clash that lasted one hour and five minutes.

This was Srikanth's first BWF semi-final appearance since November 2022.

The former world No. 1 Indian badminton player began the encounter on an extremely promising note as his attacking shots and superior net play allowed him to secure the first game 21-15.

However, the wheels came off in the second game as the 31-year-old Srikanth could hardly keep up with his opponent. Despite Srikanth taking a 4-1 lead in the second game, Chun-Yi quickly made it 6-5.

When the scoreline read 7-10, the Chinese Taipei shuttler went on to win seven consecutive points and put the game out of Srikanth's reach.

Kidambi Srikanth **PHOTO: AFP**

The decider saw Chun-Yi going on the offensive early and securing a 4-1 lead early on. However, it was Srikanth who held a narrow 11-10 lead at the mid-game interval.

The closely contested game went neck and neck until the end before Chun-Yi pulled away with three consecutive points when the game was tied at 16-16. Srikanth was also guilty of making a few unforced errors which allowed his opponent to take the game and win the tie.

On Sunday, Lin Chun-Yi will take on world No. 15 Chou Tien-chen in an all-Chinese Taipei final.

Srikanth was the last surviving Indian shuttler at the Swiss Open. Priyanshu Rajawat and Kiran George bowed out of the quarter-finals. At the same time, the women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand also had to deal with a quarter-final exit.

—PTI

Zara Anand finishes tied for 12th at Queen Sirikit Cup

CHRISTCHURCH, 24 MARCH

Zara Anand, who made her debut here, finished as the top Indian in tied 12th place after a final round of even par 72 in the Queen Sirikit Cup here on Sunday.The 16-year-old had rounds of 73-77-74-72 for a total of 8-over at the Clearwater Golf Club.The other Indians Vidhatri Urs (79-77-73-79) was tied for 24th and Heena Kang (85-76-74-78) was 32nd.In the team competition, India finished tied for ninth. Korea continued its dominance here with a fine performance on the final day. Tied at the top with Australia at the start of the last round, the Koreans steered clear on the back of brilliant bogey-free rounds of 65 and 68 from Oh Soo-min and Kim Shi-hyun.Lee Hyo-song posted a 70 that was highlighted by a hole-in-one at the third, but her score was not required in the event in which the best two daily returns in each three-strong team are counted.

—PTI

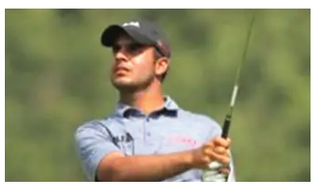
Zara **PHOTO: AFP**

SHUBANKAR FINISHES TIED 7TH AT SINGAPORE CLASSIC

SINGAPORE, 24 MARCH

Shubhankar Sharma briefly shared the lead on the back nine of the final day, but the Indian dropped two crucial shots and finished tied-seventh at the Porsche Singapore Classic here on Sunday.

Sharma, who has two wins on the DP World Tour, the second of which came in 2018, shot rounds of 68-669-68-71 for a 12-under total and ended five behind the eventual winner, Jesper Svensson, who beat Kiradech Aphibarnrat on the third playoff hole.Svensson and Kiradech were tied at 17-under as the former birdied his two closing holes and the latter eagled the 18th. *—PTI*



Shubhankar **PHOTO: AFP**

Top Americans tumble out of Miami Open

TOKYO, 22 MARCH

Three of the top four ranked American players were eliminated during Saturday's opening session with Francis Tiafoe also knocked out and Tommy Paul retiring hurt.

Italy's Jannik Sinner, the Australian Open champion ranked third in the world, made a confident start to his bid in Miami with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over compatriot and qualifier Andrea Vavassori.

Wearing the bright yellow of Brazil, Seyboth Wild, ranked 76th in the world and cheered on by loud support from his compatriots on the stadium court, produced some impressive winners and some flamboyant shots on his way to a 6-3, 6-4 victory over 12th-seeded Fritz.

Jannik Sinner **PHOTO: AFP**

Fritz's early departure came shortly after Tiafoe went out to another lower-ranked player Australian Christopher O'Connell.

O'Connell battled to a 7-5, 7-6 (7/5) win over the 21st-seeded Tiafoe after play began following a three-hour rain delay.

Paul had to retire with an ankle injury in his match against fellow American, wild card Martin Damm. Paul had won the first set 6-4 and was 2-1 down in the second when he abandoned.

Greek 10th seed Stefanos Tsitsipas also headed for the exit door at the Hard Rock Stadium after he was upset by 126th-ranked Denis Shapovalov of Canada.

The 24-year-old Shapovalov snapped an eight-match losing streak against top 20 players as he won back-to-back games at a Masters 1000 event for the first time since Cincinnati in 2022.

Aryna Sabalenka crashes out

PHOTO:AFP

After Shock Defeat to Anhelina Kalinina A traumatic week for world number two Aryna Sabalenka came to an end with a third-round, three-set loss in the Miami Open to Ukrainian Anhelina Kalinina on Saturday. The 6-4, 1-6, 6-1 win for the 36th-ranked Kalinina prompted Sabalenka, who had kept her emotions in check through both of her games at Hard Rock Stadium, to smash her racket violently into the court. *—AP*

TODAY'S MATCH

PUNJAB KINGS vs RCB

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: M Chinnaswamy Stadium, BENGALURU

RCB eye better outing from bowlers against PBKS

BENGALURU, 24 MARCH

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's IPL 2024 campaign is just one match old but it has already exposed their biggest chink brittleness in bowling, and they need better returns from bowlers against a confident Punjab Kings at an unforgiving M Chinnaswamy Stadium here on Monday.

During their six-wicket defeat against Chennai Super Kings, the pacers were guilty of blindly following a short-pitch ball strategy while the spinners just did not have enough resources to exploit a gradually slowing-down Chepauk pitch.

The three RCB spinners Mayank Dagar, Karn Sharma, and Glenn Maxwell bowled five overs between them and managed middling figures of 37 for one without actually troubling the batters.

In contrast, the two CSK spinners Ravindra Jadeja and Maheesh Theekshana bowled a combined eight overs for figures of 57 for four when the deck was much easier to bat.

So, the Royal Challengers' spinners will have to brace for a tougher task here as the 22-yard trampoline with short fences and a quick outfield is not a friendly associate of theirs.

These numbers will make that point clear. This venue holds the record of teams scoring more than 200 runs in an innings on most occasions 27 times, and the average first innings score in the IPL here is 172.

But those grim stats also put the onus on the RCB pace bowlers against Punjab.

Mohammed Siraj, Alzarri Joseph, in particular, and Yash Dayal zealously used the quota of two bouncers per over against Chennai but in doing so they sacrificed their control over line and length.

RCB's Mohammed Siraj **PHOTO: PTI**

It is reflected in their run-giving rate to Siraj (9.5), Joseph (10.3), and Dayal (9.3).

Cameron Green, the fourth pacer, took pace off his deliveries and employed the cutters that fetched him two wickets but they were interspersed with loose deliveries as the Aussie conceded nine runs an over.However, following a single-channel strategy will be suicidal at Chinnaswamy and they will have to find a way to use their copious amount of skills more judiciously.

But there is another rather unnoticed glitch. As it often happens, the RCB total of 173 for six against the Super Kings is a bit of a misinformative.

—PTI

AUSTRALIAN GP

Sainz wins F1 after Verstappen retires early with engine fire

MELBOURNE, 24 MARCH

Ferrari's Carlos Sainz surged to victory at the Australian Grand Prix Sunday to snap Red Bull's winning start to the season after three-time world champion Max Verstappen sensationally failed to finish.

The Spaniard, who had appendicitis surgery two weeks ago and missed the last race, took the chequered flag 2.3 seconds ahead of teammate Charles Leclerc, with McLaren's Lando Norris a bold third. It was Sainz's third Grand Prix win and first since Singapore last year. But it was a disastrous day for pole-sitter Verstappen, who limped out with smoke billowing from his car after being passed by front-row partner Sainz on lap two.

Verstappen made a clean start and pulled clear of Sainz when the lights went out, with Norris holding onto third as they jostled for position.

But his lead didn't last with Sainz opening his DRS on lap two to slice past and take the lead.

"I just lost the car -- weird," Verstappen said on the radio before smoke started pouring out and headed to the pits and retirement.

"I have smoke, blue smoke, fire, fire," the Dutchman said on the team radio before his first retirement in more than two years after what appeared to be a rear brake issue.

It was also a horror race for Lewis Hamilton in his inconsistent Mercedes, with the British seven-time world champion suffering engine failure on lap 17.

To add to Mercedes' woes, teammate George Russell crashed heavily on the last lap with the car ending on its side. Russell climbed out unscathed.

Carlos Sainz's third GP win **PHOTO: AFP**

- Ferrari's Carlos Sainz surged to victory at the Australian Grand Prix Sunday to snap Red Bull's winning start to the season after three-time world champion Max Verstappen sensationally failed to finish.

Verstappen emphatically won the opening two grands prix of the season in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia in a Red Bull 1-2 and was a hot favorite to make it three from three.

He had been aiming to match his own record set last year of 10 consecutive wins -- one more than Sebastian Vettel in 2013 -- and was unbeaten in his last 18 starts from pole position.

But while Verstappen was favored to win, the Ferraris had proved highly competitive in practice and qualifying on the fast and flowing Albert Park track.

Despite not being fully fit, Sainz topped Q1 and Q2 to fire a warning shot before Verstappen pounced in Q3.

"P1 baby, P1 baby, it's amazing. Life's a rollercoaster at times, said Sainz, whose seat at Ferrari is to be taken by Hamilton next year.

"Very happy, I felt great out there. Of course, it wasn't easy physically, but I was lucky I was more or less on my own out there and I could manage my pace."

On a fine day, Oscar Piastri in the other McLaren was fourth ahead of Sergio Perez in the second Red Bull. Fernando Alonso was sixth ahead of Aston Martin teammate Lance Stroll. *—AP*